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DEFENCE

OF THE

RELIGION OF NATURE,

AND THE

Christian Revelation;

AGAINST THE

Defective ACCOUNT of the
one, and the EXCEPTIONS
against the other,

IN A

BOOK, entitled, CHRISTIANITY
as old as the CREATION.

By SIMON BROWNE.

L O N D O N:

Printed for RICHARD FORD, at the *Angel* in
the *Poultry*, near *Stocks Market*. M.DCC.XXXII.



OF THE
THE
RELIGION OF NATURE
PREFACE



307
The history of the human mind, and the progress of knowledge, is a subject of great interest and importance. It is a subject which has attracted the attention of philosophers, historians, and poets. The history of the human mind is a history of progress, of improvement, of civilization. It is a history which shows us the way in which we have come from a state of barbarism to a state of refinement, from a state of ignorance to a state of knowledge. The progress of knowledge is a progress which has been made by the efforts of many generations of men. It is a progress which has been made by the discovery of new truths, by the invention of new arts, by the improvement of old ones. The history of the human mind is a history which shows us the way in which we have come from a state of barbarism to a state of refinement, from a state of ignorance to a state of knowledge. The progress of knowledge is a progress which has been made by the efforts of many generations of men. It is a progress which has been made by the discovery of new truths, by the invention of new arts, by the improvement of old ones.

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THE

PREFACE.

THE author of the following discourse, who has been long disabled for publick service by a singular disorder, and removed from the use of books, and the conversation of the learned, has imployed his retirement, under all his disadvantages, in defence of Christianity, against the boldest and strongest opposition, which, I believe, was ever made to it. This is the greatest controversy of the present age, and which ever was in the christian world, where the whole Revelation is placed at the bar, and after a long and laboured trial cast and condemned; whether upon sufficient evidence, and by an equal sentence, the reader will be able to judge: An otherguise matter this, than any controversies about particular points of revelation among christians, and which equally concerns all believers of revelation, and requires the best attention and care. And if it is managed by different persons, and in a diverse manner, it will, it may be hoped, be the more useful and the more effectual; and being set in different lights, be shewn to greater advantage.

Dr. Foster, who first appeared upon this occasion, has argued with beauty and strength, and preserved a just decorum throughout his performance. Mr. Browne has taken a greater compass, and reduced the whole book to the natural order of things, and made his work a proper system of the whole controversy with the Deists. There is a great variety of excellent reasoning upon many important points, with perspicuity and life. If the manner be thought sometimes rather too diffuse, it will make it the more easily apprehended by the generality of readers, as 'tis a matter of common concern, and of the greatest consequence, though not, perhaps, quite so much to the taste of the over critical and curious. Mr. Chandler, whom this author allows to be deservedly reckoned to stand in the foremost rank in this controversy, is preparing his Wednesday evening lectures for the press, which, I hope, together, will prove a conviction to him, as well as a benefit to the christian world; especially, as 'tis in the hands of persons who are willing to debate this matter with him to the bottom, without taking any advantage to his prejudice, or shewing any unkindness or ill-will. I suppose this will be allowed a due regard to the present controversy, from this quarter: We shall be glad to be exceeded by those who have better leisure, and greater advantages. And can one forbear to wish, That they who heartily agree in the defence of the common Christianity, should abate their prejudice and distance about lesser opinions, and external rites, which breed animosities among themselves, and weaken the common christian and civil interests of the nation too?

This

There are besides, some lesser writings, purposely penned in a more familiar way, as Dr. Tho Burnet's *Conferences*; and Mr. Hutcheson's *Christianity not older than the first Gospel Promise*. Two Parts. Printed for Richard Ford in the Poultry.

Christianity as old as the Creation, p. 247.

The PREFACE

✱

This writer has taken a great deal of pains to represent Christianity in the worst light, not only as needless, but unreasonable and hurtful, under a pretence of securing the reason and rights of mankind, and destroying superstition out of religion. This is certainly a needless and injurious Attempt, when Christianity, as it lies in the Gospel, and spirit of every human mixture, and mistake, has nothing shocking or disagreeable to the reason or rights of human nature, but is the most wise and amiable thing in all the world; the most friendly to all the interests of men, in every capacity of life, and the greatest illustration in it self, and the most perfect imitation in us, of the divine Perfections. And though I reckon it a presumptuous rashness to pretend to judge of the states of other men, without knowing the secret springs of action, and all the circumstances of the case; yet I think 'tis evident in fact, That men are sometimes prejudiced against Christianity for the purity and strictness of its rules, as much as for any articles of its faith; and from mistaken apprehensions they entertain of it, as for any corruptions and disorders among christians themselves. And certainly in that case, endeavours to detect and rectify abuses and mistakes, and reduce things to their original Standard, would be much more reasonable, and more likely to reform the world, than at any rate to lessen its credit, and weaken its influence upon the minds of men. Surely, 'tis not the way to mend the matter, whatsoever are the difficulties of Christianity, or the corruptions of christians, to bring back the christian world to the darkness and idolatry of Paganism. And there the matter has always issued, under the mere guidance of natural light, in every age, and every part of the world.

I would humbly beg leave to suggest to this writer's thoughts, who is so far advanced in life, and near another world; whether he is really serving the interests

It is not likely to give a good account of the merits and value of the work, by attending to the manner of its composition, which is so great a labour, from God, and so great a benefit to the world. And, indeed, a dying sin, under the sense of much imperfection and guilt, and in the views of a Being of perfect purity, as well as goodness, will not need the comforts and supports of Christianity, as well as the guidance and direction of it, living. But I ask his pardon, if I am thought to express a needless, or unbecoming concern.

I shall only add, That in an age of controversy and enquiry, when the reason and curiosity of men are so much awakened and exercised, and the foundations of all revealed Religion, questioned and opposed, it certainly concerns every man to examine the grounds of his religion, and to be a Christian upon principle, and not merely by education or worldly interest; as 'tis one of the noblest services to the christian world to represent religion with advantage in its proper evidence, and obviate any real difficulties, or plausible cavils, which may be thought to obscure or perplex it. I cannot but think the following laboured discourse well fitted to this end, and capable of giving great entertainment and satisfaction to a diligent and impartial reader. I would recommend to private christians, who have not leisure and capacity for reading books of controversy, the Plain reasons for being a christian, as the strangest view, in the shortest compass, of the whole christian evidence, which I believe is any where to be found.

W. Harris.

Lately reprinted in twelve, for common use, by J. Roberts, near the Old London Market Lane; and J. Grey in the Strand.



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* The Close being too large to come into this Volume, will be publish'd by it self, in a Twelve Penny Pamphlet.

N. B. The Citations from *Christianity as old as the Creation*, are, from the Edition in 8vo. The References to this Answer are in this Form. *Vid. p. &c.*

Errata. Page 64, line 7. from the bottom; *for* were, read never.



REMARKS

ON

CHRISTIANITY *as Old as the* CREATION.

THE author of *Christianity as Old as the Creation* has thrown out his objections against christianity in such a manner, that it is no little difficulty to bring them together, as he has dispersed them through his piece. But besides some *real* difficulties in some passages of scripture cited by him, several *invidious turns*, and *manifest abuses* of others, and his declamation almost every where recurring against *superstition*, *bigotry*, and *priestcraft* (which must be owned, for the most part, is but too just) what is *argumentative* in his book lies but in little room: All may be reduced to three heads.

First, His account of the *LAW of NATURE*, its *immutability* and *perfection*.

Secondly, WHAT he argues against *REVELATION* in general.

Thirdly, WHAT he has to say against the *CHRISTIAN* revelation in particular. Every thing *material* to this purpose, throughout his book, shall

B

be

be brought together, and examined in so many several *chapters*; to see if there be *any force* in it, and whether it indeed affects the *cause* or *credit* of christianity.

C H A P. I.

Of this Author's Account of the LAW of NATURE.

§ I. What he makes of this LAW.

THERE is no dispute between *this author* and *christians*, whether ^a “ God, as Governor of mankind, has given them a “ *law* for the government of their actions, and so “ *far* promulgated it, that men’s *ignorance* can be “ no just plea against their being tried by it.” At least, when he comes to explain himself, I have no dispute with him. He does not mean that God has promulgated the *law of nature*, entire and complete, to every man; but as far as they either do, or may know the precepts belonging to it, so far they can have no plea against being govern’d by it *now*, or try’d by it *at last*. We are agreed too, ^b “ That “ this law takes in *all that duty* (I mean in its *full sense*) which results from the *knowledge we have by “ our reason*, of God and *his relations*, of *our selves*, “ and *our* (I add natural) imperfections, and the “ relations we stand in to him and our *fellow creatures* :” Or, “ Whatever is founded on the *nature and reason* of things.” He should have said, one would think, to make his sentence of a *piece*, What we know by our reason to be founded on the *nature*

ture and reason of things. Christians, indeed, think *this law* comprehends all that duty which is founded on the reason and nature of things. For though men can obey no farther than they *know* their duty, yet it is not *our knowledge* of the nature and reason of things, but the *nature* and *reason* of things, supposing the agent's capacity, that are the foundation and *measure* of this law. Nor could it otherwise be a *perfect* law; on which we shall find him hereafter laying mighty stress.

INDEED he is not the most consistent writer; and therefore, notwithstanding what he says of the *perfection* of *this law*, he oftentimes makes, not the *reason* of things, but, *every man's* reason the measure of it. "Can a religion, says he, designed for *every one*, not be in the reach of *every one*? Or that which above all things it concerns *all to* know, not be knowable by *all*? Can the *law* of *nature* be clear, and the *light* of *nature* be dim? Is the *law* of *nature* any thing but what the *light* of *nature* or *reason* dictates?" Where the connexion makes it necessary to understand him of the light and reason that guides every particular man; because he is endeavouring to refute Dr. Clarke, for saying, "That the light of nature was, in fact, much impaired:" Which may be, certainly, and yet the law of nature be in it self clear. The *law* of *nature* is nothing, indeed, but what *nature* and *reason* dictates, but not what every man's reason, that is his mind, may dictate. And if a man's own reason be dim or misguided, he may mistake a dictate of fancy for a dictate of reason. And unless the law of nature be what *every man's* reason dictates (not *true* reason and nature) the light of nature, or every man's reason, may be *insufficient* to direct him in the practice of the law of nature. And unless by reason he means *every man's* reason,

Dr. Clarke's assertion may be true, nor does his reasoning militate against it. And yet at other times he talks of it as founded on the *eternal truth, reason and nature* of things; as it is indeed, in its full sense, and comprehends *all that duty* which results from the *reason and nature* of things, whether these be *properly* eternal, or no.

BUT we shall, perhaps, understand him better, when we look into *his* account of the *law of nature*, and the *extent* of it, and *his way* of demonstrating it: And according to him, it seems to take in *very little* of that duty which results from the *reason and nature* of things, and their *mutual relations*. He seemingly assents, ^e indeed, to Dr. Clarke's account of the *true deists* principles; but in the account *himself* gives us of the *law of nature* he comes vastly short; all the *piety* he owns as due to God, seems to be ^f “ A mere *veneration and love* of him, “ as a Being, who by his laws *can* design nothing “ but *his creature's* good, and is infinitely power- “ ful to effect it: The being *grateful* to this good “ Being, *praising*, and giving him *thanks*, and en- “ deavouring to *imitate* him in an *extensive* love to “ our fellow creatures.

As to *self-conduct* he tells us, ^g “ Whoever *so* “ regulates his *appetites*, as will *most* conduce to “ the exercise of his *reason*, the health of his *body*, “ and pleasure of his *senses taken together*, may be “ sure he *can never* offend his Maker, who can't “ but expect his rational creatures should act ac- “ cording to *their nature*.” A very plain and obvious account of the matter, and what sets the duty of every man in the *fullest and fairest* light on this head, no doubt. It is *very easy* for any man to know what most conduces to the exercise of reason, health of body, and pleasure of sense, taken together in the compound *ratio*: And yet here is *room* enough,

^e Page 331.

^f Page 13.

^g Page 14.

enough, in all reason, for the gratification of the senses, where a man upon the whole may do whatever most conduces to *their* pleasure, in conjunction with the exercise of reason, and the health of his body; especially himself, or his *own* reason, being judge. And he hereafter tells us, ^h "That enjoying a woman, or *lusting after her*, can't be said, without considering the circumstances, to be either *good* or *bad*. That *warm desire*, which is implanted in human nature, *can't* be criminal, when pursued in such a manner as tends most to promote the mutual happiness of the parties, and to propagate and preserve the species." And of this, according to him, the *light of nature*, that is, every ones *own* mind or *reason* is to judge. Is not here scope enough to gratify this *warm desire*, and yet be faultless? One would have expected too, that a man who talks so much of *benevolence* and the *publick good*, on some occasions, should at least have made some provision for the *happiness* of the *publick*, as well as of the *parties*, in regulating this warm desire, and directing this reasoning about it.

BUT I cannot but take notice, that he who is so certain *here*, "That God can never be offended with his creatures living according to their nature," ⁱ elsewhere condemns being governed by *selfish motives* in pursuit of future happiness, at least depreciates it, in comparison of regarding the *moral fitness of things*, and its original obligation. God, who designs, as himself tells us, the happiness of mankind both *here* and *hereafter*, and has implanted in them a *strong bias* towards it, expects they should, in this case, cross the *bent* of nature, and be rather guided by the *fitness* of things than any regard to their *own happiness* in doing their duty; and yet cannot but expect their acting according to nature in

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plea-

pleasing their senses, in consistency with the exercise of reason, and health of their body. This is very consistent morality, no doubt.

BUT when he comes to close his account, I can't find that either *piety* towards God, or *purity* of mind and life, make any part of the *law of nature* with him; for, says he, ^k "To sum up all in a few words; as nature teaches men to unite for mutual defence and happiness, and government was solely instituted for this end, so to make this more effectual (*viz.* government for this end) religion, which reaches the thoughts, was wholly ordained; it being impossible that God, in governing the world, should propose to himself any other end, than the good of the governed. Whoever, therefore, does his best for the good of his fellow creatures, does ALL that either God or man requires." So that, according to him, all that religion which reaches the thoughts, is to serve for, is to render government, solely instituted for mutual defense and happiness, more effectual for this end. And all the duty God or man requires from any, is to do his best towards this end; for thus from the connexion of his discourse must his general expression, of doing his best for the good of his fellow creatures, be limited.

AND to shew that we do not mistake him here, he tells us elsewhere, "The duty of a truly religious person, and a good SUBJECT and CITIZEN is the SAME, both with relation to God and man; for the more he honours God, the more zealous will he be to act the PATRIOT; and the more he does that, the more he honours God; because the happier men are, the more reason they have to honour God, who made them so." A consequence in both cases pretty remote. It is to be hoped, the several branches of the

the *law of nature* lie in cloſer connexion with *ſelf-evident notions*, or the bulk of mankind will have minds too dim to ſee them, how *clear* ſoever the light of nature may be. But it is plain, that according to him the *religious man*, and the *good ſubject* and *citizen*, are the *ſame* characters, their duty being the *ſame*, both as to God and man; or, in other words, *religion* and *patriotiſm* are the ſelf ſame thing.

To the ſame purpoſe he tells us again, “ That as long as men believe the *good of ſociety* is the *ſupreme law*, they will think it their duty to be governed by that law. And believing God will require *nothing* from them, but what is for the *good of mankind*, will place the *WHOLE* of their religion in benevolent actions, and to the utmoſt of their ability, copy after the *divine original*.” Society, I here take it, muſt be meant of a *particular ſociety*. Mankind taken collectively, I ſhould think, cannot be ſaid to be in *ſociety*; nor is their good the *ſupreme law* (as the world is at preſent) to which every particular man is to have regard, the *inter-eſts* of ſeveral ſocieties frequently claiſhing: So that what is for the good of mankind here, muſt be underſtood of the good of a *ſingle ſociety*; and benevolent actions towards ſuch a ſociety is, it ſeems, the *WHOLE* of religion.

BUT becauſe he talks of ^m copying after the *divine original* in this benevolence, whoſe goodneſs cannot be limited to *any ſingle ſociety*, no nor, according to him, in *any reſpect*, let it be thus far extended; yet to make *this* the *WHOLE* of religion, ſeems too much to limit the obligations of *that law*, that is founded in *reaſon* and the *nature* of things, as will by and by be made appear. That it can reach no farther than this, in his account, is plain from what he ſays to refute Dr. Clarke, who had ſaid,

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“ That

“ That mankind knew little of the *original design*
 “ of God in creating man ;” “ sure, says he, the
 “ Doctor had forgot what he quotes from *Cicero* ;
 “ *Ad tuendos conservandosque homines, hominem na-*
 “ *tum esse. Homines hominum causa sunt generati, ut*
 “ *ipsi inter se aliis prodesse possint. Hominem, natu-*
 “ *rae obedientem, homini nocere non posse.*” Which
 must imply this was the *whole* design, or else what
 Dr. Clarke says may be true notwithstanding. And
 to make it more evident he adds, “ The Doctor
 “ says the same thing, that God could have no
 “ *motive* to create things at first, but only that
 “ he might communicate to them his *goodness* and
 “ *happiness* :” How truly, I have not Dr. Clarke
 to examine.

AND elsewhere ⁿ he makes the *honour* of God
 and the *good* of mankind, that is, of society, the same
 thing ; and to make this out more plainly, he says,
 “ In a word, as man by nature is qualified to an-
 “ swer all the purposes of a *social* life, and to act
 “ (^o *herein*, for so the connexion requires) a part
 “ agreeable to reason ; so in doing this he gives
 “ glory to his Maker, by *fulfilling* the end of his
 “ creation. But if he goes contrary to the light of
 “ nature, by acting an *unsociable* and *hurtful* part,
 “ he reflects dishonour on his Creator, by defeat-
 “ ing, as far as in him lies, the design of God in
 “ making him a *social creature*.” So that a man
 in acting the *reasonable* part as a *social creature*,
fulfills the end of his creation. This with him is the
sum of the religion of nature, and those laws found-
 ed in *reason* and the *nature* of things.

AND the principle whence he deduces his ac-
 count of *this law*, how rightly will be soon seen,
 leads him into this way of thinking ; ^p “ Since
 “ creatures, says he, can add nothing *to*, nor take
 “ any thing *from*, the happiness of God, he could
 “ have

ⁿ Page 60.

^o Page 61.

^p Page 12.

" have *no motive* in making them, or giving laws
 " to those capable of knowing his will, but *their*
 " *good*. So that nothing can be a *part* of the divine
 " law, but what tends to promote the *common good*
 " and *mutual happiness* of his rational creatures ; and
 " whatever does so, *must* be a part of it : And as
 " he cannot envy *us any* happiness our nature is ca-
 " pable of, he *can* forbid those things *only* which
 " tend to our hurt. And as he *can* design *nothing*
 " by his laws, but *our good*, so, being infinitely
 " powerful, he can bring *every thing* to pass he
 " designs for this end : He *will* require nothing
 " from us, but what *this end* of entring into the
 " relation of Maker and Ruler requires : " That
 is, no more *piety* towards God, no more *concern*
 or *pains* about governing our appetites and pas-
 sions, about purifying and improving the *mind*,
 than conduces to the *common good* and *mutual hap-*
piness of society, of particular society ; *religion* and
patriotism being with him the self-same thing. In
 all other respects, according to him, we are *at a*
loose by this *law of nature*, both as to God and
 man.

THIS consequence, even from his own premi-
 ses, is not necessary. If God had, *could have* no
 other motive to make or govern capable crea-
 tures, but *their* happiness ; yet if *other branches* of
 religion, or *other* actions agreeable to the *reason*
 and *nature* of things, are for the happiness of ra-
 tional creatures, whether severally or jointly con-
 sider'd, one would think, that, according to his
 own principle, *these* should make a part of the
law of nature ; nor is it to be confin'd to that
limited benevolence, of which he speaks. Certain
 it is, that there is a *Veneration* naturally due, from
 creatures capable of rendring it, to such a Being
 as God, for his *greatness* and *majesty*, the immen-
 sity

sity and eternity of his Being and Perfections, and for that wonderful power, wisdom, and goodness, conspicuous in the works of his hands; for these he is to be admir'd, revered, and adored. It is naturally fit such creatures should live in willing dependence on him, and acknowledge their dependence by prayers and thanksgivings; that they should submit themselves and their concerns to his disposal, should resign themselves to, and acquiesce in his will, nay, and bow to his authority and command; and moreover, that they should be pure in heart, as he is pure, and holy in all manner of conversation, as he is holy, have passions and appetites under the conduct of reason, and aspire after a state of perfect reason and spirituality.

TRUE it is, that whether men pay this regard to God and themselves or no, he is neither more or less happy: But it is to be hoped, that in either case they do not act with equal decency, fitness, and agreement to the nature and reason of things; in which, all the behaviour mentioned is surely founded. If God is pleased to annex pleasure (as he certainly has the most refined, rational, and sublime) to the performance of these actions, this is an additional reason for their performance: But whether there be such connexion or not, it is naturally and eternally fit that rational creatures should pay their glorious Maker *this homage*, and what all reason ever must pronounce so.

AND, if I can remember (for I have him not to consult) Bishop Cumberland, whom this author cites more than once to serve his purpose, though he knew, as well as *himself*, that the happiness of God is *the same*, however creatures behave, yet makes a joint benevolence to God, our selves, and our fellow creatures the *fundamental law of nature*, whence all its particular branches are to be derived; and thinks his rational creatures should be
well

His way of deducing the Law of Nature. 11

well affected towards their kind *Maker* and *Ruler*, and thankfully yield him his *rights*, and carry it dutifully towards him, even from a principle of *grateful benevolence*, though they can neither add to, nor detract from his essential happiness.

AND most certain it is, a Being of *such perfections* as God is, even according to *this author*, must have the highest *self-esteem* and *value*, and an *equal* esteem for every perfection of his nature, each being in him equally estimable; and as they are united in him, they render him infinitely *valuable*, *lovely*, and *venerable*: He would not, therefore, act according to the *eternal reason* and *truth* of things, without such esteem, love, and veneration, as one may say, for himself; nor can he make creatures capable of knowing him, and being imprest with his *excellencies*, without binding them to a *proportionable* esteem, affection, and veneration; I mean according to the *measure* of *their capacities*: And the mutual relations between God and them, require all the *other* duties of *piety* I have mentioned.

A REGARD therefore to *his own* esteem and honour, could not be left out in God's settling the *laws* of *nature*. He had neglected the *reason* and *truth* of things, and their *fitnesses*, had he framed laws *meerly* for the happiness of his creatures, without any regard to, or concern for his *own honour*: He could not, therefore, give them being, and make them *capable* of being govern'd by *laws*, with a *sole* view and regard to *their* happiness. His *own honour* must have been in view, and perhaps, chiefly so, as being the *more excellent* end, and more valuable in *it self*, and therefore to *him*, than his creatures happiness. But whether this be so or no, a view to his *own honour* must have come in, in settling the *laws* of *nature*: And on opening the intellectual eye, the mind, as he says, can

12 *His Way of deducing the Law of Nature.*

as easily distinguish *fit* from *unfit* here, as the *eye* can beauty from deformity, or the *ear* harmony from discord^r. It is manifestly *fit* that God should honour *himself* in full proportion to his own capacity and excellencies; and as *fit* that he should require his *reasonable creatures* to value and honour him, in proportion to their capacities. This in *Tully's Language* is *quod decet, quod rectum, quod honestum est*. It is *becoming, right, seemly* to act in this manner, and it would be manifestly *unbecoming* and *unnatural* in creatures, not to pay their Maker *this* honour; nor would he act agreeably to the *nature, reason, and truth* of things, if he did not require this from *them*.

AND if this *must* make a part of *his* law, is it not *fit this* should be guarded by *sanctions*, as well as *any other* part? must not God *accept* and *approve* his creatures, and *disapprove* and be *displeased* with them, according as they honour or slight him? Could he be pleased with *himself*, must he not be *displeased* with himself, if he had no value and esteem for so much *venerable excellency*, as his own Being offers to his view? And though he be not, as this author expresses it^r, “an *ambitious, suspicious, wrathful, and revengeful* Being; tho’ he has no such *jealousies* in point of honour and power, as are common amongst mankind, even those who would pass for the most *manly, generous, and noble*, much less any thing in him resembling the *weak, womanish, and impotent* part of our nature”; yet if he must be displeased with *himself*, did he not esteem and value himself, so must he be displeased with his *reasonable creatures*, for a failure in this homage; and much more if it be accompanied with *contempt*, which is too often the case; though *this author* confidently avers^r, “no man breaks divine laws
“out

^r Page 26.

^r Page 33.

^r Page 32.

“out of contempt of God, or imagines he can do him an injury.” And if he be displeased with them, they must expect a suitable treatment. This true, this carriage cannot ruffle or disturb him, nor give him any pain, such as we feel upon displeasure; if this be what *this author* means. “by God’s not being affected with the non-observance of his commands,” it cannot really hurt him, but yet it may and does really wrong him. It is with-holding *his due* from him, and is so far injurious to him: And though he has no painful or passionate resentment, he may and must have a calm and becoming resentment of it, and treat the undutiful and injurious creature accordingly.

Does not *this author* allow, that God has annexed natural pain and pleasure to moral good and evil? “That if we act according to the dictates of right reason, we shall here have true inward comfort and satisfaction, and hereafter complete happiness: But the man who abandons reason, must feel in his mind pain and anguish here, and in the Life to come; when no sensual things divert his thoughts; insupportable grief and misery”! Why was *this* pain annexed by God to immoral actions? does not this plainly signify, that the offender is under *his displeasure*? Is not *this* pain from God owing to his constitution, and wrought by him into the nature of the mind? Could not he have separated *this* pain from reflections on guilt, and made the thought of it as void of all uneasiness as any other? Must not he therefore inflict this pain? And is it not plain then, and that from the nature and reason of things, that God must be displeased, not only for men’s abandoning reason, but disobeying his natural laws; or treat them as if he did resent this behaviour? And have

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have not all men, when conscious of guilt, a *sense* of having disobey'd God, and being liable to his displeasure for it? Is this the mere effect of *superstition*, as *this author* endeavours to represent it? Is it not rather the *voice* and *sense* of reason and nature.

If God, acting according to *nature*, must be displeased with himself, if he did not reverence and honour his own perfections, must he not act an *unnatural* part, if he were not displeased with *rational creatures* for not paying him such homage? Has he not shewn himself to be displeased with it, by annexing pain and misery to *such misbehaviour*? Yet does the guilty mind only act a *superstitious* part, when to a sense of guilt it annexes a sense of *divine displeasure* and *dread* of a Deity dishonoured and offended by it? or is it only to be pained for acting an *unreasonable*, but not for acting an *undutiful* part? is this, indeed, the dictate of *truth*, of *reason*, of *nature*? Does God require of all men, as *this author* tells us*, “that they should “act (in religion) from a principle of *love*, void “of *all fear*”, or represent him to their minds, as *solely* meaning their *good*, but utterly regardless of *his own* honour, and perfectly indifferent how they carry it towards him, if they pursue *their own* weal, or are kind to their *fellow-creatures*, or are, as he sometimes expresses it, *good subjects* and *citizens*? Sure, from what has been said, this cannot be agreeable to the *nature* and *reason* of things.

It is becoming God to honour *himself*, to expect honour from his *rational creatures*, to approve those who pay it, to dislike and be displeased with those who *do not*; even *all that honour* that results from his perfections, and the mutual relations between him and his creatures, and *their capacities* for it.

All

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All regard to his honour could not therefore be out of view, and no part of his design in making a world, and giving a *law* to rational creatures: Nor was, therefore, *their* happiness his *sole end* in their creation, and his government over them: Nor can *their good*, therefore, and much less in *this author's* restrained sense, be the *sole measure* of what is the *law of nature and reason*, as he every where makes it.

TRUE it is, God has annexed *pleasure* of the most noble and exalted kind, to those *actions* of his creatures that are directly for *his honour*: He has also annexed pleasure to every *other act* of duty, required by the *law of nature*. He has formed man with capacities for *bliss*, and given him a natural *bias* and *inclination* towards it, both *personal* and *social*; and, in the nature of things, has shewn what actions have a *tendency* to this end, and what a *counter-tendency*; and thereby signified (*goodness* being certainly a perfection of *his nature*;) that it is *his will* one kind should be performed, and the other shunned: And this constitution is an evidence of his benevolence to mankind. And hence it may be inferred, that his *natural law* is framed with a fitness to promote *man's happiness*; which so far may be said to be the *intention* of it, and God's *government* according to it.

BUT it is carrying the matter too far, to say, that nothing that is not either for our *good* or *hurt* can be *commanded* or *forbidden* by the *natural law*; especially if every *man's* reason, that is, his present judgment of things be made the *measure* of good and evil; which is commonly the case, as put by *this author*.

AND whence is this conclusion drawn? why, from this principle: "that because God is in-
" finitely

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“ finitely happy, and cannot be more or less so,
“ his *only* end in making and governing *rational*
“ creatures, must be their happiness”. That in the
frame of his laws, God has pointed out to man-
kind the *sure way* to happiness, is certain: That
a due regard paid to them, will produce *this effect*,
is manifest: That what *is*, and *sound reason* pro-
nounces to be, for the highest good of the *indivi-*
duals, and the *common good* of mankind, in con-
junction with the *honour* of God, is enjoined by
these laws, is out of question. And were this
all meant, by God’s making the happiness of the
creature *his end* in governing them, I should have
no dispute with *this author*.

BUT this comes not up to *his meaning*: since
he plainly draws many *consequences* from his prin-
ciple, which have no necessary *connexion* with
what is here allowed. He would hence make the
good of the creature so *wholly* the intention of
God, in making and governing them, as that *every*
individual *must* be made happy under this govern-
ment, and *all his laws* must be known by their
tendency to this end. God can require *that*, and
that only, which is for the creature’s good, in *necessary*
connexion with it, and can forbid *that*, and *that*
only, which is for their *hurt*; and this too,
if he be self-consistent, their *common good* or *hurt*.
And this is with him that *eternal reason* and *na-*
ture of things, by which God *must* govern *all his*
actions, and men *theirs*. Citations to this purpose
may be brought from every *chapter*, and almost
every *page* in his book.

THE authors, from whom he borrows *this*
principle, never, one would think, dreamt of *such*
consequences to be drawn from it; and would re-
nounce the principle, rather than admit them.

BUT if this were the *whole* and *sole* purpose of
God, in making rational creatures, and giving them
a law,

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a law, why is there so little regard, in fact, paid to it throughout the world? This happiness is not to be had, but by a due regard to this law in all its branches. "A being infinitely powerful, as this author tells us, can never want means to bring about what he designs." If it were, then, his sole end in making and governing man, to make him happy, and this cannot be without his paying obedience to his laws, how comes it to pass, that these laws are so little observed, and the miseries of mankind consequent hereupon, are so great, both at present, and in past generations? whence all the mischiefs of which he so tragically complains? Have the wicked priests in all ages had the cunning or power to defeat the benevolent purposes of a God of infinite wisdom and power, and introduce so much misery into the world, in spite of his kind designs? Does the event or state of things in the world carry evident marks of such a design? Or, is it evident from the reason and nature of things, notwithstanding so much contrary appearance in the state of things? Though God wants no power to effect what he designs, all mankind are not happy: And of what force is speculation and argument, when fact is against them?

SUPPOSE it was in the power of God to make every man happy, by an exact obedience to his whole natural law; if I saw this was the event, I could easily believe, it was the purpose of God in making man, to make him happy by such observance. But when in fact I see much misery in the world, and this resulting from the non-observance of this law, I cannot be persuaded that it was God's purpose to make mankind universally happy by his government, much less his sole purpose: For what could have frustrated his purpose, or rendred his will ineffectual?

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105 If it be said, this would have destroyed the liberty of the reasonable nature; yet it would have secured the happiness of it: and if the making the creature free, rendered his happiness precarious, when the divine goodness required that this should be the sole end of making him, where was his wisdom in making him free? that God's design of his happiness might be rendered uncertain at best? Did he not know his own design, or was he ignorant of the proper method, in which to pursue it? and yet in pursuit of a design to make man happy, the sole end he could have in making him, make him free, and so capable of frustrating this design; nay, do this with a certain prospect, that, through abuse of this liberty, multitudes of mankind would be miserable? Were these fit and wise means for such an end, as the universal happiness of mankind, and could this be the sole end of God in making man, when such ineffectual, and therefore improper means were taken by him to reach and ascertain it? Surely, if God, in making and governing mankind, designed their happiness only, he would have framed them in such a manner, and in such a manner have influenced them too, as that, by their obedience to his laws, their personal and common happiness should have been effectually secured.

HAD this author contented himself with saying, that man's happiness is the manifest intention of the law of nature, or even the sole intention, he had been nearer the truth. But to make that the whole and sole end of God's making and governing men, which, in fact, appears not to have been his design; unless we suppose him destitute of power and skill to effect it, is, one would think, no little absurdity; but a very great one it is, to make this the sole foundation, on which to build our knowledge of the laws of nature. That can never be the eternal truth and reason of things, discover-

ing

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ing and settling our duty, which is inconsistent with the *state* of things, that is, *their truth*. Nor *that* the end, *sole end* of God in making and governing men, with which *the state* of mankind, in this, and all past generations, is in great part utterly inconsistent.

THIS author, indeed, has a *salvo* for these appearances, in contradiction to his scheme; but what, I doubt, is utterly insufficient. This is, "that the punishments of a *future life* will correct men's *minds* and *manners*, and bring them to a regard to the *laws of nature*; and so to the possession of happiness." But he has no evidence for this; but taking his position for granted, that this was the *sole end* of God, in making and governing man. But if this were his *sole design*, and this may be collected certainly from his being infinitely good and happy; why, when it was in his power to prevent it, did he expose them to the suffering of any misery at all? especially "the *insupportable grief and misery of a future life*?" If this were the *unavoidable* consequence of man's being made *free*, what necessity was there of his being made *free*? Nay, did not *wisdom* require his being made *otherwise*, if it be the business of wisdom to *chuse* fit means for its purpose? And better were it, that man should be made *necessarily* happy, than miserable through *freedom*, though this misery were not to be *perpetual*, and more consistent with the purposes of God, if his *sole end* in their creation and government was *their happiness*. It is not easy to see how it can be consistent with this design, to make men at all obnoxious to misery, unless it were out of God's power to make them *otherwise*; or to make men free, if this rendered them *thus* obnoxious.

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THIS author's reasoning in another case, is much more proper and cogent here. If God made men, and governs them for this *sole end*, that they may be happy, and yet framed them with such a nature, as made them liable to fall into, and continue in a state of corruption; and, I add, do much mischief to themselves, and be a plague to others, and spread misery amongst mankind; "I would ask, whether God did this *knowingly*, or *ignorantly*, not foreseeing the consequence? If *the first*, it is to make God act out of spite to his creatures, in bringing them into being, and making *that Being* a curse to them;" and, I add, a plague to others. "If the *last*, why was not a remedy applied, as soon as the mischief was discovered? Why was not *folly*, and *superstition*, and *knavery*, and *priestcraft* at once rooted out of men's hearts?" Was the happiness of mankind God's *sole end*, in making and governing them, whence then these *common trespasses* on the laws of nature; this wretched *bondage* of mankind to the priests of all countries and religions; these *discords* among men; the wastes by *war*, by *tyranny*, by *persecution*, and the other mischiefs, of which he so loudly complains? Could infinite power, "able to effect whatever it designs," apply no remedies, no *immediate remedies* to these evils? Must they proceed till the *insupportable* grief and misery of an after-life shall correct men's tempers and manners? There can be no *necessity* for this; certainly; nor therefore for the sufferings of a future life at all. God had, and ever has it in his power to hinder all the *present* mischief, and make the world throughout a scene of *peace*, *concord*, and *mutual kindness* and *good-will*; and prevent all the miseries of a *future* life too. And when he has nothing in view but the *happiness* of mankind, and has it in his power to prevent

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prevent all these evils, how is it reconcileable with his wisdom, not to prevent them? Why should they suffer any misery at all?

NAY, why should not all men now, as well as hereafter, enjoy all the happiness of which their nature is capable, if this were the end for which such a nature, as he tells us, was given them of God? especially since, as he says, *God's goodness is always the same*. If he can't grudge us any happiness, of which our nature is capable, and therefore must forbid what is for our hurt, and his goodness is ever the same, why must he not also prevent what is for our hurt? And why then does he suffer any hurt, at any time, to befall any of mankind? Is not their nature capable of happiness without mixture of misery; and here as well as hereafter? and God's goodness ever the same? Why then do they ever feel any misery? Why is the happiness of multitudes postponed, till they have hardened themselves in wickedness in this life, and undergone the intolerable grief and misery of a future state? If the sole end of God in making and governing mankind were their happiness, no reason can be given why any one of them, for any time, should in any degree be wretched.

It seems therefore evident upon the whole, that the happiness of all mankind, and every individual among them, was not the sole end of God in making and governing them, much less all the happiness of which their nature is capable; the contrary being most notorious in fact, in this world, and, according to this author, in another world too, at least for a time.

AND if for a time, why not to perpetuity, to the utmost duration of their Being? If because God must make their happiness his end, why should they, whence are they liable, to misery at all?

Misery

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Misery is the *opposite* to happiness, not the *perpetuity* of it. If they are miserable *at all*, and much more *intolerably* miserable, so far, and so long they are destitute of *happiness*, and cannot be said to be made of God for it, *wholly* and *solely* made for it. But if this be no reason against it, at least no *better* reason than against their suffering *at all*, why may not God leave them to endure *that* misery, which from the frame and constitution of *their* nature, they have brought on themselves by *their* sins, for the whole term of their existence? When he had set *life and death* before them, shewn them the natural connexion, by his constitution of things, between *sin* and *misery*, and they chose *death* rather than *life*, and wilfully sinned on, notwithstanding this connexion, does goodness oblige him, for *their* sakes, to vacate the constitution, and change the *nature* of things, and either reduce *them* to nothing, or take away *their* power of reflection or sense of guilt, or alter and correct their temper, and fit them for happiness?

THAT this would be great goodness and mercy to *them*, is not to be doubted. But that God must do *all the good* he can, to *all his* creatures, or not be infinitely good in *himself*, does not appear: There is then no room for him to do good with distinction. His goodness must be exercised in *conjunction* with his other perfections: Favours may be lavished away on *unfit* persons: This is not goodness, but *folly*. God's *honour* and *authority*, and that of *his law*, are necessary to be maintained, and *wisdom* may require, that such as by wilful sin, impenitently persisted in, have made *themselves* miserable, should be left by him in their *self-chosen* and *procured* misery, and not the established constitution of things be destroyed, to deliver them from it, or take from them the sense of it; and their continuing misery may be for *the good* of the

world in general, though not for theirs. Nor does any reason appear, why God in goodness is more concerned to *deliver* men out of such a state, than to *prevent* their falling into it.

THIS *author* allows, that men are framed *immortal*, and that a *necessary connexion* is established by God himself, between *vice* and *misery*. By this constitution, the *misery* of sinners, in a future life must be *perpetual*, as lasting as their Being. The connexion between the *continuance* of their misery and their *immortality*, being as necessary as that between their sin and misery; if it were consistent with both *wisdom* and *goodness*, for God *antecedently* to settle such a constitution, which this *author*, one would think, should allow, and that upon certain *fore-sight* of the event, why should it be *inconsistent* with either, to continue the constitution, and let it have its natural effect *after* it?

INDEED, could this *author* prove, that the miseries of a future life, when all *tempting*, as well as *pleasing* objects are withdrawn, are, in their own nature, *apt* to amend sinners dying incorrigible, and will *naturally* and *certainly* produce this effect, he might then conclude more *certainly*, that God's end in making and governing rational creatures, was *first* or *last* to make them happy. But this proof will not serve his purpose. And I am mistaken, if it be not evident, that he concludes *wrong*, when he would maintain, that these punishments *must* amend them, because the *sole end* of God, in making and governing them, was *their* happiness: And if it be not as evident, that he is out in this *grand position*, that this was the *sole end* of God's making man, and giving him a law. And *this* position failing him, all the conclusions drawn from it must be *void of force*, which is in a manner his *whole book*.

24 Of the Perfection of the Law of Nature.

§ II. Of the perfection and immutability of the LAW OF NATURE, and whether Revealed Religion must be the same with it, no more, nor less.

N O one, I dare say, will dispute with this author, the perfection of the law of nature. It is much more full, comprehensive, and, in that respect perfect, than he seems to apprehend it; including all that duty resulting from the nature and reason of things, and the mutual relations of God and his creatures, and of mankind to one another.

B U T the reason given by him for the perfection of this law, seems to be no very good one: "It is perfect, says he, because no law can come from a Being of infinite wisdom and perfection, but what is perfect; absolutely perfect." And again, "Can laws be imperfect, where a legislator is absolutely perfect? Can time discover any thing to him, which he did not foresee from eternity?" May he not as justly say, that all the effects of an infinitely wise and perfect Being must be absolutely perfect? Will he hence infer, that because he was not born an absolutely perfect man, therefore his Maker was not a Being of infinite wisdom and perfection? And why may not a law come from such a Being then, that is not absolutely perfect? As a child is not as perfect as a man, nor can a law fitted to a state of childhood, be equally perfect with one fitted to a state of manhood; may not therefore an infinitely wise law-giver make a law for children? The same may be said of laws for men and angels.

T H E wisdom of legislation is shewn, in fitting laws to persons, their state and condition, and the ends for

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for which they are intended: And a perfectly wise law-giver may make laws in *this* perfection, without making them *absolutely perfect*. Nay, the absolute perfection of laws would argue their *imperfection*, if hereby they were rendered *unfit* for their proper use and end. The law of nature, indeed, being intended to direct all mankind, or if you will, all rationals, in their *conduct* towards God, themselves, and their fellow-creatures, as founded in the *reason* and *nature* of things, and to be discovered by the *light* of nature, or *reason*, must comprehend *every* duty resulting from the *nature* of things; and thus discoverable, and so far be perfect; but not *merely*, because it was the law of an infinitely perfect Being, but a law by him *perfectly fitted* to these purposes. But he may also give laws to particular Beings, or particular societies, besides this *general* law, and yet be *infinitely* wise and perfect, whilst these are *wisely adapted* to the circumstances of those to whom they are given, and to the special ends for which they were designed.

BUT when he asks, "Can time discover any thing to God, which he did not know from *eternity*?" I answer, perhaps, no. What then? His wisdom and knowledge must be the same *now*, and *from eternity*. Admit this; What then? "And since his goodness is *the same*, as well as his wisdom, his laws must be *the same*; unless he arrived not at the *perfection* of his goodness and wisdom, till about seventeen hundred years ago." What, the same *from eternity* e'er creatures were made, or laws established? But allow him to mean from the beginning of the world; Why must God's laws to his creatures for ever be *the same*? "Because his goodness and wisdom continue ever the same; and unless his laws continue ever the same, till *these* were made perfect" and

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“and immutable, his wisdom and goodness could not be perfect.”

THIS reasoning appears not to me to be in any manner of connexion with *self-evident principles*, of which *he* often speaks with an air of much assurance. God did foresee from eternity, suppose, all that should happen in time, and through time; his wisdom and goodness were the same they are now from eternity, and will be the same to eternity; What then? Must God do all he does at once? Must there be *no change* in what proceeds from him, without his being changeable? Suppose he made not the world at once, but part one day, and part another; nay, suppose it at years distance; were not his wisdom and goodness perfect, till the *works* of his hands were perfected? Nor then neither, unless these works of his remained *unchangeable*? And why then may he not make *some laws* at *one time*, and some at *another*; and yet himself at *all times* be perfectly wise and good? Or must *every law* of infinite wisdom be *for ever* unchangeable? Can he ordain nothing *pro tempore*? Or if he make a general and eternal law for *one end*, must he make no other laws, neither for *other ends*, nor in subserviency to this, however requisite the *changing* circumstances of his creatures may make this, because himself is unchangeable? Or, because he foresaw such change of circumstances would happen, must he therefore give out those laws *ab origine*, which only change of circumstances made requisite, and which were *unsuitable* till this change was made; or else pass for a Being *imperfect* in wisdom, till these laws too were given out? I own, this seems not, to me, to be a *necessary* conclusion from any *self-evident* notions.

BUT,

Of the Perfection of the Law of Nature. 27

BUT, says he, "If God be *unchangeable*,
" *our duty to him must be so too?*" This does
not appear; However *unchangeable* God is, it
is certain man is *changeable*; and a *change* in man,
may make a change in *his duty to God* necessary:
So that though God be *unchangeable*, and man
stands in the same relation to him still, yet even
God may become related to him on a *new* account;
which will infer an obligation to *new duty*, even to
God himself.

BUT he adds, "If human nature continues the
" same, and men at all times stand in the same
" relations to one another, *the duties*, which result
" from thence too, must always be *the same*: And
" consequently our duty both to God and man
" must, from the beginning of the world to the
" end, remain *unalterable*; be always alike plain
" and perspicuous; neither changed in *whole* or
" *part*." But supposing there be a *change* in hu-
man nature, and it be different from what it origi-
nally was; and that some men are brought into
new relations; new duties may hence arise, even
from the *reason* of things. And he should not
have taken this for granted, and run away with
his conclusion right or wrong. The nature of
God is *unchangeable*; the original relations
wherein we stand to him, are also *unchangeable*;
and the duties thence resulting are *still* owing to
him, and *ever* will be. Man must for ever be
bound to *own*, and be *impressed* with his glorious
perfections, and pay him veneration, love, and
praise upon their account, and bear *resemblance* to
him in his *moral excellencies*. We must own him
as our *Maker, Preserver, Lord, and Ruler*; and
thank him for his benefits, live in continual *de-*
pendance on him, and speak out this in *daily pray-*
ers; give our selves, and our affairs up to his *dis-*
posal;

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posel; be resigned to his will, and, let me add, submit to his rule, and yield obedience to his command, whenever and however he is pleased to signify his mind to this purpose. But if to these original relations he is pleased, out of mercy to sinful men, to become also God our Saviour, with this new relation, new obligations must be brought on us; and we may hereupon be brought into new relations to some of our fellow-creatures, if it be only as fellow-disciples of the great minister, employed in accomplishing and making known this salvation. And this being supposed, I may in turn say, "Consequently our duties to God and man, from the beginning to the end of the world, are not the same, without change in whole and in part; no not even from the reason and nature of things:" Since a change in the state of things, and their mutual relations, must infer a change of obligation in the reason of the thing.

HUMAN nature may and may not be the same, which it was at first, according as the expression is understood: And the like may be said of the relations wherein we stand to God and man. It may be still a reasonable nature, and so far the same. It may now be a sickly sinful nature, when at first it was sound and innocent, and so not the same. God's original relations may be the same to us as ever they were, and yet there may be occasion given by men's behaviour and change of state, for his entering into a new relation to them, and taking them into a new relation to himself, and one another: And so, upon the whole, his relations to us, and ours to him, may not be, in all respects, the same. And this author should not have taken it for granted, that there has been no such change; but should have proved it, before he had so confidently drawn his consequence: Especially when this appearance is against him; viz. That the world of mankind

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mankind is certainly now in a *sinful state*, and it does not look likely that this was the *original state* of man. It looks as probable, at least, that the first creature of the kind should be made in a *more perfect state* than man is at *present* in, so that God's laws must all be so perfect at first giving them out, as never to admit an alteration. But we shall often find him in *such haste* for the conclusion, as to take *his premises* for granted.

"But, says he, God's laws, whether internally or externally revealed, must, at all times, be the same, since the Author of them has ever been immutably the same." But, as has been already observed, the wisdom of *legislation* consists in adapting laws to circumstances, and the condition of the persons to be governed by them. Let the legislator be ever so *unchangeable* in himself, if the condition of his subjects be *changed*, there must be some *alteration* in the rules of government. The *sick* and the *sound* are not to be prescribed to alike. If, through *freedom abused*, man be at present in a corrupt and sickly state, God may make laws *suitable*, without any change in *himself*. This is but wisely suiting his government to the changing state of things. And this author himself tells us, "That to alter one's conduct as circumstances vary, is not only an act of the greatest wisdom and judgment, but consistent with the greatest *steadiness*." It is spoken, indeed, of *human* conduct, but it holds as well of the Divine. If *varying* circumstances require him to vary *his* conduct, this is acting according to the *reason* of things, argues no mutability or *unsteadiness*, but is an act of the greatest wisdom. And, indeed, upon the foot of *our author's* reasoning, I can't see but all the changes in the *natural world* will prove the *mutability* of God their Maker.

AND

30. *Of the Perfection of the Law of Nature.*

AND yet himself owns, that a change in *circumstances*, and so far in the *reason* of things, may make a *change* in the very law of nature. “*Incest*,” says he, “is now, for very good reasons, a crime, and breach of the natural law; yet Adam’s children must at first have married one another, or there had been an end of the race at once.” And he says, if a family of *brothers* and *sisters* were now cast on an island uninhabited, and cut off from all communication with the rest of their *species*, they might marry one another. Are not all his *triumphant reasonings* about the *immutability* of the law of nature applicable here? “If God be *immutable*, must not his laws be so too? If his wisdom and goodness were always the same, and time could discover nothing to him, which he foresaw not from *eternity*, must not his laws,” and, I add, must not every law of his “be always the same?” Could *Incest*, therefore, be once lawful, and afterward become unlawful, without a change in God? Is this good arguing? If not, the *duty of nature* it self may change, on a change in the *reason* of things, even apparent to men. And yet, is God limited? Must he make no alteration in *nature’s* laws, whatever reasons offer for it to his *infinite* understanding? Never add any other laws? This, one would think, would be a *limitation* of the power of the supreme Ruler, not founded on the *reason* and *nature* of things.

No, says *this author*, it is not. Why so? His light informs him that God must, at no time, make any additions to the *all-perfect* laws of infinite wisdom, nor any change in them, nor at any time suspend the obligations of any one of them, upon any consideration; “for the light of nature demonstrates, it seems, ¹ from this infinite wisdom and goodness, what God can or cannot command.”

And

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And his light, which to be sure is this light of nature, informs him from the divine wisdom and goodness, that God can command nothing more nor less, than he has commanded in the all-perfect law of nature. But, for my part, I can see no reason in nature, why, because God has been so good as to give mankind his natural law, so evidently fitted to make them happy, that he must hereupon divest himself of all farther authority over them, and bind himself, for ever after, to act, not as shall appear right and fit to his own perfect understanding, but to the limited understanding of the creatures governed by him; much less to the understanding of this author, and those in his way of thinking. It looks not a little unnatural, to suppose, that what men's minds suggest to them, a Being of infinite goodness and wisdom must or must not do, should be a rule to him, and limit him, so that he must not pass these bounds without trespassing on the laws of reason himself, and acting otherwise than he should. It seems to me, whatever this author's light may demonstrate to him, much more agreeable to nature, that the governed should pay a deference to wisdom so much superior to theirs; and admit that he, who sees so much farther into the circumstances, reason and nature of things than they, and so much better understands them, may see some constitutions reasonable and fit to be made matter of new laws, which they themselves may not see to be founded on the nature and reason of things; especially since, as this author allows, man's reason is not infallible; and, I may add, is very frequently under the sway of appetite, passion, and manifold prejudices. And it would be much more consonant to reason, from the evidences of divine goodness, so conspicuous in the frame of his natural laws, to conclude, that any additional laws he is pleased to make, are also for the good of his subjects; than in

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our author's way, to make his notions of the Divine goodness the measure of all God's laws to his creatures, and hence presume to say, what he can or cannot command.

But what is it he would infer from this discourse, about the perfection and immutability of the law of nature? Why truly, "That natural religion and revelation must, like two tallies, answer each other, without any other difference, than in the manner of revealing them."

WHETHER his arguments will infer such a conclusion, is left to the reader, after what has been said, and needs no farther consideration here. I shall only observe, that the whole law of nature is adopted into the evangelical constitution; it explains it, it enforces obedience to it, and offers helps to the performance of it; but to say it binds nothing farther on us, is to make it inconsistent with it self, and under pretence of honouring, to cancel and enslave it.

BUT, says he, "If God never intended men should be without religion, or have false religion, and there can be but one true religion, which all have been ever bound to know and embrace, believe and profess, this Character can't belong to Christianity, unless it be as old as the creation." This is really playing with Words. God never intended men should be under no obligations of religion. This is plain from binding on them the law of nature. This binds the religion of nature upon all men. This religion all men are obliged, and ever will be, to know and embrace, believe and profess; and, I add, practise too. And he never authorized a false religion, or one opposite to the law of nature. But it was never God's intention to hinder men from voluntarily corrupting and falsifying religion, even the religion of nature. For had this been his purpose, there never could

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could have been any corruption of religion. In this he left, and intended to leave, men to their own free choice, without over-ruling it, and thereby preventing such abuse. But what meant he by saying, "If there can be but one true religion, and this be the religion of nature, then Christianity can be nothing else?" That is, if he yield his point, he'll carry it; Grant but his premises, and he won't thank you for the conclusion.

THE religion of nature, considered as entire, is always the same; and Christianity is this very religion, with some merciful and wise additions, accommodated to the state of mankind as sinners. If this makes it another religion, then there may be two true religions; and if there be two, there can be more than one. But if we are to understand him as restraining this saying by what follows, "If there can be but one true religion, which all have been ever bound to know and embrace, &c." and this should be allow'd him; this will not prove Christianity must be the same with this one religion, unless it be first proved that all men have ever been bound to know and embrace, &c. which no one I believe, ever yet asserted. Even those who enjoy'd the benefit of a former revelation, yet were not bound to know and embrace Christianity; much less were the rest of the world then. And none are now obliged to know and embrace it, who never had, nor could have, the means and opportunity of knowing it.

NOR is himself to be understood of all men's being obliged, in all times and in all places, to know and embrace the whole religion of nature, but only as much of it as was discoverable by every man, from the best use of his reason, or natural light. Human reason he owns is fallible, and men liable to mistake. "And God, who has made

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"made men fallible, will not impart to them the
 "want of infallibility." Himself limits his knowledge
 which all men are ever obliged to have of this one
 true religion: "It is only as far as is necessary
 "for them to know. And an ignorant peasant
 "may know what is sufficient for him, without
 "knowing as much as the reader of St. James's."
 This, I should think, would infer, that there
 may be many true religions, which men, accord-
 ing to their different capacities and advantages,
 may be bound to know and embrace, &c. though
 as far as their capacities reach, it be but one.
 Nay, perhaps, that there is no one true religion,
 which all men are ever bound to know, &c. The
 religion of one may, according to his own account,
 comprehend a great many particulars more than
 that of another. And why Christianity, then, as
 far as it is now, may not be another religion,
 which all who have opportunity should know and
 embrace, &c. I mean, if there be good evidence
 of its being from God (which will be afterward
 considered) I cannot see. Surely this may be a
 religion which some, thus circumstanced, may be
 bound to know, &c. though others, not so circum-
 stanced, are under no such obligation; as well as
 much of the religion of nature should be known of
 some more than others, as they are variously circum-
 stanced.

"But, says he, were we not capable of di-
 "stinguishing good from evil, or knowing, from
 "the invariable divine perfections, what divine
 "goodness could command or forbid his crea-
 "tures, antecedently to any revelation, we could
 "not distinguish the true instituted Religion from
 "the many false ones." Whether we are capable
 of knowing from the divine perfections, what di-
 vine goodness can or cannot command or forbid,
 has

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has been already considered. But what is meant by knowing what divine goodness can command, from the *invariable divine perfections*, is out of my reach. Nor do I understand *who* they are who are capable of knowing this antecedently to divine revelation; whether *he* and his *philosophers* only, or every *person*; that they may distinguish the *true* revelation from every *false* one. Nor can I think this *comprehensive* knowledge antecedently necessary to this end. A revelation from God may set much *truth* and *duty* in view, which was before unknown, and yet upon discovery may appear worthy to come from God, by attending to *that light*, which from him, as he tells us, shines into *every mind*. There is no necessity for such a comprehensive knowledge of *good* and *evil*, of what God *can* and *cannot* command or forbid, antecedently to revelation, as would, in this respect, render it in a manner needless, that a judgment may be made if it be *true* or *false*. I cannot but think, the *Hottentots*, who, if travellers deserve *any* credit, know little of the *invariable divine perfections*, nor therefore from them, what divine goodness *can* or *cannot* command or forbid; upon *instruction* in Christianity, might have such an awakening of natural light in them, as to enable them to distinguish between *true* and *false* religion, and perceive whether this were a religion *worthy* to have God for its *author*, and capable of *external* divine attestations.

But let us hear what is racked to this; "If the *light of nature* be sufficient to enable us to judge *rightly* in matters of religion, and to distinguish *truth* from *falsehood*, since there is no disagreement in truth, there must be an exact conformity between *external* and *internal* revelation, but in the manner of their being revealed. The *gospel* *can*'s command what the law of nature

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36 *If Revelation must be the same with it.*

forbids, nor forbid what that commands. Nor can any thing be a part of religion by one law, which is superstition by the other. Nor can revelation make that to be the will of God, which the light of nature continually represents as unworthy of God. Of the sufficiency of the light of nature we shall have occasion afterward to treat. But allowing it sufficient to enable us to distinguish truth from falsehood, and judge rightly in matters of religion, and that there is no disagreement in truth; must it follow, that natural religion and revealed religion must be just the same, except in the manner of discovery? Indeed, if no truth were knowable but what natural light discovers, no new duty possible upon a new discovery of truth, there would be some force in this argument. But may not revelation discover some truth not knowable before, and enforce some duty not before enforced, founded on this discovery? If truth never disagrees with truth, this can only mean that no one truth carries opposition in it to any other truth; not that all truths are the self-same without any difference, or in other words, that there is but one single truth, or true proposition in nature. And if this be his meaning, revelation must carry no repugnancy in it, indeed, to true and right reason, or to any certain truth discovered by it. But hence it will not follow, that it can discover no truth, not knowable by mere, unassisted natural light; nor therefore, that the truths revealed by both must be just the same, no more nor less. And admitting the gospel cannot command what the law of nature forbids, nor forbid what that commands, nor make that the will of God (his commanding will) which true and sound reason ever represents as unworthy of God, may it not therefore enjoin what, by the law of nature, is neither forbidden nor required? Or on revealing some truths natural light could not discover, enjoin

enjoin some duties founded on them? Is there any thing *abundant* or *incongruous* in such a supposition? If not, how inconsequent is his argument! Nor is there any absurdity in supposing God may command that, which without his command, natural light must pronounce *superstitious*; as hereafter will be made appear.

“BUT, says he, if no command can alter the nature of things, or make that *fit* which is in it self *unfit*, external revelation must attend the nature of things, and only speak what *that* speaks. And again, external revelation not being able to make any changes in the *immutable* nature and relations of things, and the duties naturally resulting from them, can only recommend and inculcate those Duties; unless we suppose, that God at last acted the tyrant, and imposed such commands as the relations we stand in to him, and one another, no way require.” But if a command of his cannot alter the nature of things, and change what is *unfit* into *fit*; yet a change of circumstances, and, so far, of the nature of things, may render that *fit*, which under other circumstances were *unfit*. There is no necessity therefore, that revelation should speak *that*, and that *only*, which the original nature of things speaks, and require *only* what the law of nature does. And should revelation be allowed to make *no change* in the duties of the natural law; a *standing revelation* I mean, but leave men under the full force and obligation of all of them; yet it follows not, that it must enjoin these *only*, without making additional Duties, flowing from *superinduced* relations, and founded on truths *undiscoverable* another way.

AND to say, “God hereupon must turn tyrant, and impose commands, such as the relations we naturally stand in to him, and one another, no way require,”

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It is not a little shocking; and considering how much he limits the law of nature, and how little he allows God may require by virtue of these natural relations, is monstrously shocking. What! must God turn tyrant, if he presumes to enjoin any thing, which, to this gentleman's good judgment, seems not to besit the relations wherein he stands to his creatures, or they to one another! If he enjoins any thing, which the original state of things did not require, however congruous to the present state of things, and fitted and designed for his creatures good! Is this talk that of deism, true deism? It shows no great veneration for the Deity, nor much regard to the nature and reason of things.

WHEN the laws of nature were but little known, and less regarded by the bulk of mankind, and its voice was hardly heard throughout the world, must God reach out no help to his degenerate creatures, nor presume to go beyond the original constitution, even for their good; nor by any new injunctions render this constitution more effectual for its original design, without ceasing to be a king, and becoming a tyrant and usurper on his creatures rights? They have, it seems, a right to tie him down to his first constitution, and refuse all farther laws and rules, even for their own good: And the world's sovereign must have the worst of characters, and be represented as an oppressive Being, and invader of his subjects rights, by such a stretch of power! Is not this talk and way of thinking, exceeding congruous to the nature of God and man, and their mutual relations? Does it not carry in it, high veneration for his perfections and authority? Or rather, is it not in effect, to make a mere tool of him, and subject his authority to the wisdom and will of his creatures?

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BUT a remedial constitution, and a new revelation, were, in this author's account, perfectly needless. And his arguments to this purpose we shall now attend.

CHAP. II.

His Arguments against all Revelation consider'd.

HAVING consider'd this author's account of the law of nature, and his argument from thence, that revelation must be nothing more nor less than the religion of nature, and shewn, it is hoped, its defect; I now proceed to consider, what he has to say against revelation in general: for all he says, in seeming favour and compliment to Christianity, is but a cover; his real purpose is to set revelation aside, and reduce men to the law of nature; his law of nature, to make their whole religion, patriotism and benevolence to one another. His pretence is, that revelation is perfectly needless: His mediums to prove this are chiefly two:

First, THE sufficiency of the law and light of nature to bring men to happiness.

Secondly, THE necessity that reason should be used in examining the proofs, and settling the meaning of a revelation. This, he thinks, must presuppose a knowledge of the great principles and truths of morality: And if these must antecedently be known, before a revelation can be of use, of what farther use can it be afterward? Whether these arguments will serve his purpose, we proceed now to consider.

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Of the Sufficiency of the law and light of nature to bring men to happiness.

THAT the law of nature is framed and fitted to make every man happy, who yields exact obedience to it, is not to be doubted. That in the original state of man, not only his understanding, but all his other powers were adjusted to this law, is reasonable to believe, it being very natural to suppose, that every being in its first formation should be perfect in its kind. Such a being therefore, as man, may be well supposed to have been thoroughly instructed in his whole duty, and free of all moral defects and blemishes.

BUT if such a being were made free, and therefore mutable, had appetites and passions, which, under the guidance of reason, and the natural law, might contribute to his happiness; but if permitted to disregard or oppose reason, would corrupt his mind, vitiate his taste, cloud his understanding, prejudice it against enquiries into the natural law, and render itaverse to the practice of what it requires; such a change of circumstances must render the original adjustment of his faculties to the law of nature, of little signification. Such a creature, by abuse of his liberty, would disadjust what God in his original constitution had most wisely and kindly adjusted. And if this corruption, through an hereditary vitiated constitution, a negligent and loose education, the prevalence and influence of bad example, company and customs, became universal and increasing, the light of nature, thus corrupted, might become very ineffectual towards its original design, though not totally extinguished, and the laws of nature little known and less regarded. In such a state of things, a revelation to make the law of nature more fully and clearly known, to enforce its obser-

observance, to afford *helps* and *motives* to the better performance of what it enjoins, and relieve the guilty mind against all its *iniquities*, would certainly be a merciful vouchsafement from God to mankind, and be much for their advantage and happiness. And it is a very *unthoughtful*, *undutiful*, and indeed *unnatural* conduct, quite agreeing with the truth, reason, and nature of things, to slight and undervalue it, and cry it down, as *needless* and *useless*, when all reasonable evidence is offered of its divine original. But let us attend the *author*, in what he advances, in proof of the sufficiency of the light of nature, to prove all revelation *useless*.

"REASON, says he, by which men are distinguished from brutes, is the only means they have to know, whether there be a God, and whether he has given laws to men, and what these laws be." What are we here to understand by *reason*, but the man's, every man's reasoning faculties and powers? By these, man is distinguished from brutes. Are these the only means we have to know, &c. These we may have, and yet in fact know little of God, his laws, &c. Or are we to understand these *faculties* in use and exercise about these subjects? Are there no means to assist those faculties in such use and exercise? Must every man learn this from the sole use of his own faculties? Then his *philosophers*, the great teachers of morality, and their instructions, were perfectly *useless things* to the rest of the world. But if their instructions were of any use, to help men in these enquiries, *other means*, besides the man's own reason, might certainly contribute to men's knowledge of God, &c. And if *philosophical* instructions might be such means of helping men's understandings and reason in these enquiries, it is very strange that

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that *supernatural* instruction by God, if vouched true, should be no *such means* of giving us the knowledge of God, &c. But if by the *only means*, he means the *only faculty* by which we can know God, &c. This is *true* indeed; it is by our reason only we are capable of knowing any thing. But this does by no means imply, that this may not greatly need assistance from heaven, in discovering many truths concerning God, &c.

Or, are we by *reason* to understand, not the *faculty* of reasoning merely, nor merely this *used* and *exercised*, but *the truths* discovered by it, and the capacity from hence of collecting *other truths* in a *natural* way, without any other helps than we may have from the reason of our *fellow-creatures*? Say, that this is the *only means* we have, to know whether there be a God, and whether he be a *law-giver* to mankind; may not yet some means be *supernaturally* afforded, that may set his *nature* and *laws* in a clearer light, than every man, or all men can by their *single* or *united* reason? May one man's reason be a means of enlarging *another* man's reason in these matters, and yet may not *divine revelation* be a means of enlarging every man's reason? And if the reason of *all men* be weak and impaired, and God vouchsafes such *supernatural* helps, do they act a dutiful part who slight these helps, and throw revelation aside, from a *proud conceit* of the sufficiency of their reason? Surely, if such a revelation be vouchsafed, reason, in any sense, is not the *only means* we have, to know what God or his *laws* be; though the knowledge that there is a God, must be antecedent to our receiving a revelation as *divine*.

BUT what is the consequence he draws from this assertion? "As they have no *other faculties* to judge by, (nor means, he should have added, "to

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“to help them in judging, their using these in
“the best manner they can, must answer the end,
“for which God gave them, and justify their con-
“duct.” If by this he means, that men who
have nothing to help them, in their enquiries into
religion, but their own reason, with common na-
tural helps, and yet sincerely endeavour to know
their duty, and practise what they know, will be
mercifully accepted of God, I will not dispute it;
being willing to extend divine mercy as wide as
reasonably may be. But I am persuaded, the very
best of men experience so many defects, even in
their honest endeavours, as not to think their con-
duct throughout justifiable on this foot: though
they may encourage themselves to hope, that God
in mercy will accept their honest, though imper-
fect endeavours. But, when he says of mankind
in general, that their using their faculties in the
best manner they can, must answer the design for
which they were given; that is, in his sense, pro-
cure them all the happiness, of which human na-
ture is capable; and that, though they neglect and
despise the means God offers them, to know and
practise better, I cannot see, for my part, that
this has any connexion with any self-evident notions
or principles. No, nor that this must answer the
design for which they were given, even in those
who reject not supernatural helps, in his sense of
the words; as will be more fully shewn hereafter.
When men are sinners before God, the best use
of their faculties that can be made, will not neces-
sarily infer their being as happy as their nature is
capable, were this a supposeable case. Surely, those
who are obnoxious to justice for their sin, must not
necessarily be entitled to happiness, upon their doing
the best they can for the time to come, as will be
made plainly hereafter to appear. Again,

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“*Then* and, says he, for which God implanted *natural religion* in human nature, was to “*make them happy here and hereafter*; and he “*could, at no time, leave them destitute of the “proper means, for answering this end*.” It was before, to make them happy *here or hereafter*, now it is both *here and hereafter*. But because this was God’s design in implanting natural religion in men’s minds, he could never leave them destitute of the *proper means* for this end. What does he mean by these *proper means*? “*They “must have sufficient understanding to discover, “and sufficient abilities to comply with this law, “except we suppose God, infinitely wise and “good, requires, from his creatures, things “which he has not enabled them to know and “perform*.” What he means by God’s design to make men happy *here and hereafter*, has been shewn and consider’d before: But what are we to understand here by *sufficient understanding*, and *sufficient ability*, to know and do the will of God, the *proper means* for making men happy? Does he mean only that he must have furnished them with the *natural powers*, requisite for this purpose? If this be all, might not men, by neglect of their understanding, or not exercising it about these subjects, whatever its natural power be when used and improved, be ignorant; and by *corrupt biases*, either *hereditary*, or issuing from vicious practices, disable themselves for performing the duties of natural religion? And when mankind had brought themselves into a state of *general ignorance and corruption*, had lost sight of their happiness, nor had any heart to pursue it, was it a privilege to be left in this state? Was it no advantage, to be favoured with a *revelation*, to help against this ignorance and disability?

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OR, are we to understand him, that God *must* actually *shine* into all men's minds, and discover to them all their *natural duty*; and actually *remove* all their incapacities and prejudices against the performance, which they had brought on themselves, or else *fail* in wisdom or goodness, by requiring from them, what he did *not* enable them to know and perform? This, according to his sense, already explained, must, one would think, be his meaning here: For, since God's *sole* design in making man is his *happiness* here and hereafter, even every man; and to reach *this end*, is not only necessary that he should *know* his duty, but have *ability*, nay, and a *will* to perform it; must not God *fail* both in wisdom and goodness, if both are not vouchsafed, I mean, according to him? Yet this accords so *little* with the state of things in the world, that one must conclude, either he is mistaken in his notion of God's *wisdom* and *goodness*, or there is *little sign* that a wise and good Being governs the world. This last is *atheism*, if I mistake not, instead of *deism*.

OR, does he mean, that whatever *unhappy* circumstances men are in, by *whatever* means procured, how defective soever the *knowledge*, and the *general state* of mankind however corrupt and depraved, yet if any endeavoured to know their duty, as well as they could, and practise accordingly, they must be hereupon accepted of God, and made as happy as human nature is *capable*; I see no necessity for it. Defects of this kind, brought by men's *own faults*, are certainly to be imputed to them. But as the *corruption* of mankind was owing to a *concurrence* of causes, and not wholly from men's *selves*, there might be room to conclude from the *mercy* of God, and hope at least, that such would be accepted of him: But, it by no means follows, that

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that they *must* be as happy as human nature may be. Yet in such a case, would not a revelation be exceeding *useful* to mankind, though not absolutely necessary to their happiness? And is such mercy in God towards corrupt mankind, a good reason for fighting such a revelation as *useless*? But, says he, since God has given mankind *such a law*, (as that of nature) he must have given them *sufficient* means of knowing it; since a law *unknown*, or *unintelligible*, ceases to be a law. But God, who had the making of a man's understanding, and his own law, must have adjusted one to the other." This he elsewhere farther explains; "Where no law is, there can be no transgression; and an *unknown* law, is no law: And consequently, all mankind must, at all times, be capable of knowing all that God requires." Again, "So far as God's laws are supposed *not plain* to any part of mankind, so far you derogate from the perfection of those laws, and the goodness and wisdom of the legislator; who, since he had the framing of *their* understandings, to whom he dictates *his* laws, must have adapted one to the other." Here we have several things taken for granted, which should have been proved. A law indeed not *knowable*, or not *intelligible*, is, in effect, no law. But this does not hold as to every *unknown* law. It is every *subject's* concern, to enquire into the laws that regard his *own* conduct. No legislator thinks himself bound to make his laws known to every particular subject. If they are so far promulgated, that every one whom it concerns, may know them on *due enquiry*, this is enough. A law *unknown* from defect of such needful enquiry, may be a law in force, and bind such as *do not* know it, or rather their obligation to know it may bind them.

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ALL that cannot be known, or not understood, is indeed different. Those in such circumstances, as that the knowledge of it is impossible, it does not properly blind: Nor will any be condemned of God, for not obeying such laws. "But God, who had the framing of *their* understandings, and his *own* laws, must have adjusted and adapted one to another." What is meant by this? These men *must* have the natural capacity to know *all* the duties of the natural law, if they will be at the pains to make a deduction of them from *self-evident notions*. If so, it is very plain, that if mankind do not attend to these *self-evident* principles, and make their *deductions* from them, they may be ignorant of these laws, as well as of any other truths, deducible from other *self-evident* principles: "And that, though the reason of all men (as the office and again tells us from Dr. Clarke and Cumberland) is naturally and necessarily assents to them, as all animals conspire in the pulse and motion of the heart and arteries, or as all men agree in the *abhorrence* of *murder*, and the *brightness* of the *sun*." For the same may be said of any *mathematical* *axioms*, or *truths* demonstrated. Every man, on seeing the evidence, as naturally and necessarily gives his assent: Yet very few among mankind have knowledge of such truth. And though the laws of nature are most necessary to be known, and of much more general use, and therefore are in general better known, yet if men apply not their minds to the study of these laws, if through *depraved* inclinations, a *corrupt* taste and *dissolution* of manners, they contract an *aversion* to this study, or through *blind* deference to prevailing customs and usages, or *implicit* faith in either *priests*, or *priest-baiters*, they have embraced principles, and are grown fond of practices

inconsistent

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inconsistent with the laws of nature, they may be in great ignorance of the laws, and this in full consistency with the goodness and wisdom of God, if it were at first consistent with them, to make such intelligent creatures with freedom of choice, liable to such abuse.

“No, says he, if the laws of God are supposed not plain to any part of mankind, you derogate from the perfection of those laws, and the legislator’s wisdom and goodness;” and without this, in his account, men’s understandings, and God’s laws are not duly adjusted: And when his hand was in, he might have added, and easy to be obeyed. And at this rate, I can’t see but we must derogate from the perfection of God’s law, and his wisdom and goodness too, if every man, at all times, does not actually know, and readily obey every law of nature: For all this is the duty of mankind in general, though it be supposed God will, in mercy, accept less from imperfect creatures, who sincerely endeavour to know his will and do it. And if it be an impeachment of his wisdom and goodness, to suppose any part of God’s law unknown to any part, (and it might as justly have been said) to any one of his creatures, because this argues, that his law is not adjusted to their understandings, must it not impeach these perfections as much, to suppose that any one law of his is not obeyed, because this as much argues the non-adjustment of his laws to men’s executive powers? And will it not follow hence, that God is defective in wisdom and goodness, if all his laws are not only knowable to all men, at all times, and practicable by them; but actually known, and actually obeyed? Surely the state of the world will either prove this argument wrong, or God to be deficient in wisdom and goodness.

But

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BUT if his meaning be, that the law of nature must reach no farther, than it is known and practised by every particular man; at least than it is knowable and practicable; what then is become of the perfection of the law of nature, to which no addition can be made; the all-perfect law of infinite wisdom? Or, indeed of the immutability of it; seeing it is *one* law, as regarding *one* person and part of mankind, and *another* with regard to others, according to their varying capacities, advantages, state or circumstances?

BUT, says he, can it be imagined that God, who has given all animals sufficient means to act for their own preservation, has not given men, who have immortal souls, made after his image, sufficient means to provide for their happiness, at one time as well as another, and in one place as well as another? Or, when he has given men notice by their senses, what is for the good and hurt of their bodies, has had less regard for their immortal parts, and has not, at all times, by the light of their understandings, given them sufficient means to discover what is for the good of their souls? Again; "Instinct is a certain and infallible guide for animals; and is not reason as certain and infallible a guide for rational, as instinct for irrational creatures?" The unhappiness of this writer is, that his arguments very often conclude too far. This is the case here. "God, says he, has given all animals sufficient means for their own preservation." What are these means? "Instinct," and this "Instinct is an infallible guide, and this, sure, to every animal." "And, man having an immortal soul, made after God's image, is more valuable in himself, and dearer to God than the brutes can be." Will it not hence follow, that God must there-

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therefore afford every man such light of reason, as shall infallibly conduct him to happiness? "God gives notice to every one by his senses, what is for the good or hurt of his Body: Has he less regard for his immortal soul?" And must not his understanding, then, as well, and as constantly suggest to him, what is for his soul's good or hurt, as his senses do what is for the good of his body? Should not his argument conclude thus, if there be any force in it? But then the state and experience of the whole world would give it the lye.

BUT indeed there is no arguing from God's method of proceeding with brutes, to that with men; if instinct in them, whatever it be, is infallible, human reason, by his own acknowledgment, is fallible. Brutes have no moral power in the use of instinct; but man is a free being, or moral agent, and is therefore capable of neglecting, abusing, and corrupting his understanding, and other powers of his mind. If this be actually done, wherein is divine goodness blameable? Must the supreme ruler interpose to prevent this abuse, and over-rule and alter the nature and constitution of things, and deal with man as with brutes? If it was not inconsistent with wisdom and goodness to make men free, with a foresight of the abuse of this liberty, it could not be inconsistent with this goodness to leave them to themselves, and the effects of this abuse. And if men by neglecting and depraving their understandings, and other powers, were, in fact, become ignorant of the law of nature, and insensible of its obligations, even in the most important branches, and God was pleased, for rectifying their mistakes, and reforming their practices, to vouchsafe them a revelation, his mercy, in this respect, should be acknowledged with all thankfulness. But it is not a little criminal to impeach the goodness of God, for that

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that men, by abuse of their liberty, had made this extraordinary interposure highly expedient, if not absolutely necessary, to put them, who had universally deviated from the law of nature, into the right road to human happiness.

“BUT, says he, if religion belong to us as men, must we not as men be capable of knowing it? And if men are religious as they are rational, must they not be capable, when they come to the use of reason, of knowing a religion founded on reason?” But what means he by religion’s belonging to us as men, and our being religious as we are rational? If he means religion is essential to us as men, enters into our constitutions as men, and is ever connected with our reason, so that we must be as necessarily religious, as we are rational, he contradicts the sense and experience of the whole world. And if hence he would draw his conclusion, that therefore as men we must be capable of knowing it, as soon as we come to the use of reason, it is a self-evident consequence indeed, being but the self-same thing in other words; and if he had added, we must as men have known and practised it, it had been equally evident. But an argument contradicted by the experience of the whole world, needs no confutation.

BUT if he means only, that as men, and rational, we are subjects capable of religion, or framed and fitted for it; all to be hence inferred, is, that when we come to the use of reason, we may be religious, and both know and practise it; not that we must; nay, nor so much as that we may, whether we use our reason, or no; whether we are prejudiced against this knowledge and practice, or no; whether we have been educated in principles and practices opposite to true religion, or no. Men may be ignorant and irreligious, as well as know religion

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and practise it: As *reason* makes them capable of religion, *liberty* makes them capable of being irreligious.

AND indeed reason it self, as mankind are at present, needs the *help* and *benefit* of instruction and education, that they may know and practise morality. And this himself seems to own, when he tells us how ^{*} the *heroes* of old, who were such *benefactors* to mankind, were formed; though one would wish he had told us, *who* those *heroes* were, and *what* their benefactions to mankind, that one might have judged of the *benefit* to be had by such an education. And it is as evident, however *capable* reason renders man of religion, that men *without* instruction and education, will make but *little* good use of their reason, and know and practise *little* of religion; and under a *bad* education, and the influence of *bad* example, will acquire *little* knowledge of religion, and contract *great* aversion to it. And manifest it is, in *all* experience, that men of *great* reasoning capacities, in other respects, are often but *little* disposed to religion.

"BUT, says he, can a religion designed for every one, not be *within the reach* of every one?"
 "Or that, which above all things *concerns* men to know, not be knowable to all?" What he means by religion's being designed for *every one* should have been explained. Means he, that God intended all men should be *under obligations* of religion? So certainly they are, but *all men* don't act according to the obligations they are under. Or, means he, that it was *the purpose* of God, that all men should be *actually* religious? This must argue, that the purpose of God has been *frustrated*, for all men certainly are *not* religious. And, what does he mean, by being *within every one's reach*? That every one *may* know the whole of religion,

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however he is situated or circumstanced, *the whole* of that religion of nature? This, I doubt, will hardly accord with the state of mankind, either *now* or in *ages past*. Or, does he mean that men may know *all* of religion, which, in their circumstances, is *needful* to be known? which, according to him, is all that can be known of them. This also is a self-evident conclusion, that what is within their reach, *must* be within their reach. What they *may* know, they *can* know. And supposing no more than this knowledge, and a suitable practice, is *necessary* to God's acceptance with him, may not much of *natural duty*, on this foot, be unknown to multitudes in the world, which yet it is every *one's advantage* to know? If it be the knowledge and practice of religion that makes men happy, the more he knows and practises, must he not be the more happy? Or is an honest *Holentot*, by his knowledge and practice, to be made as happy as a *Socrates*, an *Epictetus*, or an *Antoninus*? And is it not every *one's* concern to be as happy as his nature will allow, and therefore to understand and practise as much of religion as possible, even *the whole* that is required of man? And when he may be instructed herein by revelation *supernatural*, is it not a very *odd turn* of mind to say, "No, excuse me, what is the concern of *all* must be knowable by *all*? I know all that is knowable by me in my *circumstances*, and I have no concern to know farther." Is this either *wise* or *dutiful*? Does it speak *due regard* to a man's self, or *due thankfulness* to God? Should an *Holentot*, on this pretence, reject the instruction of a *philosopher*, and tell him, "Good sir, bush up; a religion design'd for every *one* must be within the reach of every *one*; what is the concern of *all* must be knowable to *all*, an *Holentot* and a *philosopher*, the most uncivilized *Barbarian*, and the most learned *Roman* or *Greek*?"

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“ *Crack?* What do you offer me farther instruction for, since all of religion that concerns me to know, is already within my reach, and knowable without your help?” Would an *Hotentot* do well or wisely, who should thus reject the instruction of one of his philosophers? If not, yet would one of his philosophers do better, who should on the same foot reject the instruction offered by a divine revelation, well attested? I should think not.

“ *BUT*, says he, the mutual relations wherein we stand to God and men, are the permanent voice of God to mankind, and do at all times point out to us our duty, in all the various circumstances of life. And is it possible for God, more fully to make known his will to all intelligent creatures, than by making every thing within them, and without them, a declaration of it, and argument to observe it?” But let the mutual relations wherein men stand to God and one another, ever so infallibly point out their whole duty to them, in all the various circumstances of life; must they therefore infallibly know it, and practise it too? May they not neglect to take notice of what these mutual relations point out to them? And when men have, in a great measure, lost sight of those relations, how should they know what duty these pointed out? And yet this was the case of the *heathen world* heretofore, and is to this day. *This author*, who has had the benefit, I suppose, of a *christian education*, and is a great master of reason, seems to me very ignorant of some of these relations himself, and the duties founded on them. He knows nothing of God’s authority, or owns nothing of it, beyond what is for the good or hurt of his creatures, of which they too must be judges. And yet this relation of God to his rational

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tional creatures, seems to me, to be as plainly pointed out by the nature of things, as any other relation of his whatever; and if he, through ignorance or prejudice, overlooks it, I can't see but those who never had his advantages, to improve their reason in matters of religion, may be ignorant of much natural duty, that is infallibly pointed out, by the reason and nature of things.

AND whatever declaration is made to us of our duty by every thing within us, and every thing without us; and how permanent soever the voice of God be; men may be regardless of the voice of God, be unattentive to this declaration, and unaffected with the argument it offers. By vicious biasses they may be prejudiced against it; and when this is the case in general, God may make known his will by revelation, both more plainly and fully than it is known, if not more plainly than it is declared by the reason of things. And I am mistaken, or natural duty is more fully revealed in scripture, than it is to this gentleman's own understanding, though it be so much above the common size, unless he believes his own sense.

"BUT, says he", there can be no necessary truths, not possibly to be discovered by the light of nature, because God's means of information must always bear an exact proportion to the necessity of knowing what we are obliged to know, especially with regard to God's attributes."

Downright impossibilities, it is readily allowed, God will require of no man; truths therefore, which cannot possibly be discovered by the light of nature, God will not require them to know and believe, who have no other light than that of nature. But if he is pleased in a supernatural way to make other truths known; sure, upon this discovery, he may

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require they should be known, and the duties founded on them be performed; and to those who have the *means* of knowing them, make them *necessary* to be known. God has *other* means of information, certainly, than natural light; and if it be allowed, that *his* means of information must hold *exact* proportion to the necessity of things to be believed; some things may be yet *necessary* to be known, beyond what natural light can discover; to those, I mean, who enjoy *such farther* means: He is mistaken therefore, when he would make no truth *necessary*, but what natural light *can* discover. But even with regard to *those truths* which natural light may possibly discover, *the author* must reduce the things necessary to be known to *very few*, if he makes nothing necessary but what *every one's* measure of this light can discover. Ignorance, vice, may prevail to such a degree, that many *very important* things in religion and morality may lie out of the reach of multitudes, even of the *bulk* of mankind; nay, and that with respect to the *divine attributes*: And he knows nothing of the world, who knows not this to be fact. If these are not absolutely necessary to be known to *those* out of whose reach they *wholly* lie, is a revelation, making them known, for *this* reason, either needless or useless? If men may be accepted of God without it, they may be better accepted by means of it; and on this account should be thankful for it, and not despise it, under a pretence, that *natural light* is sufficient without it.

“But, says he, if God could not *will* to be worshipped, without willing *some way* or other of being worshipped, and *left* it to the light of nature to discover *how*; could that be for any *other* reason, but that it was acceptable to him to be *thus* worshipped? Is it not a *contradiction*, to

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“ to suppose God would be worshipped, and yet
“ let men, even *the best*, be *entirely and unavoidably*
“ ignorant *how*? Does not the *light of nature* tell
“ us, God is a Being of infinite wisdom and goodness,
“ and that all his *natural faculties* are directed by
“ these *two attributes*, to serve the purposes of bene-
“ volence? And can men be ignorant, then, *what*
“ worship and service to render him? Can we
“ doubt, if we endeavour to have the *same frame of*
“ mind, and govern our selves by the *same laws of*
“ benevolence, whether we shall obtain his fa-
“ vour? ” This author, as has been observed al-
ready, often takes the premises for granted, and
runs away with his conclusion as certain. He asks
a question, presumes every one will be so complai-
sant to answer as shall be for his purpose, and car-
ries his point without more ado. If God has requi-
red to be worshipped, he has certainly required it
should be done in *some way or other*. This is self-
evident, as being in a manner an identical propo-
sition. And if God has in *his sense* left men to the
light of nature, their *own light*, however darken'd,
deprav'd or vitiated, to discover *how*; it was for
this reason, no doubt, acceptable to him. That
is, worship *how* they would, if it was as *their light*,
that is, *their minds*, dictated to them. But had he
any right to take this for granted? Or suppose,
that God left it to the *light of nature in this sense*,
to discover and direct, *how* he would and should be
worshipped. True reason, which is the *proper light*
of nature, directs how God is to be worshipped,
both as to *substance and circumstances*, where there
is no farther direction given. But every man's rea-
son is not *right reason*; and as far as it is not, it is
not the *light* but the *darkness of nature*. And tho'
where men have no *better*, but use their *dim light*
as well as they can, and do their duty as far as they
understand it, God may accept *themselves*; it is a
gross

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gross mistake to imagine he will accept *that worship*, which though *their* reason judges right, *true* reason must pronounce wrong; and which *he*, who, in the language of one of his *philosophers*, is *adulta ratio*, must as such disprove.

And though *sound* reason, which only is the *true* light of nature, may rightly direct how God is to be worshipped, in the sense above explained; yet, for any thing he knows, God did originally direct man to worship in some *other way*, than even right reason could discover; in which case God has not left man to the discoveries of the light of nature as to his worship; and if they have *faultily* lost these directions, and the way God had shewn them is no longer known by this means, they have *reduced* themselves to a necessity of following *their own* imperfect light. In this case God might *mercifully* accept *them*, though their worship deviated from the direction he had given, and from *what* even right reason would have suggested; but it does by no means follow, that *their way* of worship *must* be acceptable to him. And if God is not to be *blamed* for their falling into this ignorance; nor is he blameable for their continuance in it. Nor is it any manner of *absurdity* to suppose, God requires worship, *reasonable worship*, in whatever way he shall appoint, from his reasonable creatures, and yet let men, even the best of men, in *his sense*, be ignorant how he was to be worshipped.

And though he laughs at Dr. Clarke for giving this reason, why men were *unavoidably* ignorant of the manner in which God would be worshipped, that "they fell into the *practice* of the most *foolish* "idolatry;" adding, "Never any before called "the worshipping idols worshipping the true God, "though *unacceptably*;" the ridicule turns on himself. Dr. Clarke had no need to suppose, that worshipping

shipping idols was worshipping the true God; and yet might assert the philosophers unavoidably ignorant of the right way of worshipping God, and make their falling into gross idolatry a reason of this assertion; since their falling into the worship of false Gods, must argue them ignorant of the right way of worshipping the true God, or wilful violators of the first duty of natural religion, by worshipping false Gods. Could they think the most foolish idolatry, in conjunction with the rational worship of the living and true God, was worshipping him acceptably? Or, if they did so, were they not undoubtedly mistaken? And was not this mistake unavoidable? Or, when they knew it wrong, were they under an unavoidable necessity of offering this idolatrous worship, not to the true God, but together with his worship? For they practised this idolatry in a manner universally. And has he not as much room, or even more, to blame the God of wisdom and goodness, for leaving them under this unavoidable necessity as to practice, even against light, than to leave them under unavoidable ignorance, as to the right way of worshipping him? Or, without necessity did they wilfully practise this idolatry, in defiance of light and conviction? How much more kind is Dr. Clarke's supposition concerning them, than this? And how much better an excuse?

BUT when he adds, "What natural light tells us of God's wisdom and goodness, and his natural faculties being under the direction of these two attributes, to serve the purposes of benevolence," I suppose he means natural power in distinction from moral capacity.

BUT, what is divine goodness, according to him, but benevolence? and that, to his creatures; he being so perfectly happy, as to have no self-regard in making or governing them? What then means

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“divine faculties being under the direction of wisdom and goodness, that is, *benevolence*, to serve the purposes of *benevolence*?” This, at least, is not accurately express’d, for a writer of his exactness. But let us understand him, that his power is always under the direction of *wisdom*, to serve the purposes of *benevolence*. Natural light can never reach that, which, in fact, is not true: And yet all appearances, throughout the world, are against this, as ^a has been shewn.

BUT the inference he would hence draw, is in a manner wild. Men cannot be ignorant, it seems, what worship and service to render to God; “For it can’t be doubted, but if we endeavour after a like benevolent frame of mind, and to be govern’d by the same law of *benevolence*, we shall obtain his favour.” That is, if we do what, according to him, is impossible, we shall doubtless obtain his favour. Impossible, I say; for he deduces this *benevolence* of God from the perfection of *divine happiness*. How then is it possible for an imperfectly happy being to be benevolent like him, or act by the same law of *benevolence*? I cannot see what advantage it can be to any, to be put out of doubt by the *light of nature*, that thus being and doing he shall be accepted of God.

BUT let us suppose, that the same frame of mind means a different frame, and the same law another law suited to another nature. Is all that the *light of nature* requires concerning the worship of God, a mere imitation of his *benevolence* to our fellow-creatures, as far as our state and nature allow? I think the contrary has been made appear. Surely *benevolence* towards the supreme Being, is a part of that duty, which, by nature, and the reason of things, is owing to him. And this *benevolence* should be express’d by inward esteem, veneration, honour

^a Vide Page 16, &c.

^b Vide Page 9, &c.

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honour and devotion, and by outward adorations and acknowledgments, in praises, prayers and thanksgivings, with all becoming and natural tokens of reverence. And without this, *what* benevolence we have, or *show* to our fellow-creatures, methinks, natural light should not put it out of doubt, that we shall have acceptance of God herein. At least natural light, one would think, if it be not darkened or corrupted, should declare these to be branches of that worship naturally owing to God. And consciousness of guilt may give the mind doubts and jealousies, whether even such devotions and services will be accepted. But no *the* light of nature will, I am confident, pronounce that man accepted of God, who pays him no other worship than what is implied in his benevolence to his fellow-creatures. An acknowledgment and veneration of the *divine excellencies*, an imitation of the *divine purity*, and a willing, unreserved subjection of the whole man to his command, and high authority, are certainly as *essential* branches of that worship, which, by the *law of nature*, is due to God.

“But, says he, the light of nature is not to
“be charged with *undeniable defects*; since, if *that*
“light was sufficient to answer the ends designed
“of God, which was to be a *competent* guide to
“men with relation to their *present* and *future* hap-
“piness, there could be *no deficiency*. If not,
“there must be an *undeniable default* in the giver of
“it, in appointing means not sufficient to answer
“this designed end, though both *ends* and *means* are
“wholly in his power.” But this consequence I
can by no means admit: How defective the light of
nature *was* and *is*, will quickly appear. The facts
are undeniable; what then? “Why then, says
“he, if the *light of nature* was sufficient to answer
“the

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"the ends designed by God," that is, "to be a competent guide to men, with relation to their present and future happiness, there could be no deficiency." Suppose it to have originally been, not only a competent, but complete guide, yet not being naturally indefectible, but in possession of a free Being, capable of neglecting, impairing, and corrupting it, might it not, by this means, become not only an incomplete, but an incompetent guide? and this, without any default in the giver? Or, must God not only put free creatures into a capacity for bliss, but do all in his power also, to prevent their abuse of their own freedom? Or, however this freedom be abused, and this light by their own fault lessened and obscured, must it still be competent to reach its end, or the fault be that of the giver? Is not this, in effect, to lay the blame on God, however man act, and make him the author of their unhappiness, if through their own faults and neglects, they make themselves unhappy?

Or, suppose, that from the mercy and goodness of God, it may be hopefully inferred, that God will admit them to happiness, who make the best use of the powers they have, however weakened and corrupted, for knowing and doing his will; an happiness, I mean, answerable to the talents they have and improve: May not the light and powers they have, be yet very defective and incompetent, to lead them to full and complete happiness? If in these circumstances, men may know all the truths necessary for them to know, may not many truths necessary to complete felicity, or that happiness, of which human nature is capable, be yet unknown? And may not other helps be wanting, to quicken men to the actual knowledge of many truths, which they might know, did they not neglect the improvement of their faculties, by

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what means of information they have? Are mankind so studious of these truths, as to need no such quickenings? He must be a great stranger to the world, and human nature, as now it is, who can think so. Even his philosophers were hardly such lovers of truth, and such enquirers after it, as to need no excitation; or at least, no motives to prevail with them not to hold the truth in unrighteousness, and do what their consciences reproved them for doing. And if this were the case, was not their light, or at least their motives to practise according to it, undeniably defective?

BUT, indeed, all general speculations of the power of human reason, and the sufficiency of natural light, by one mew'd up in a study, or us'd only to converse with philosophers, without a knowledge of the world, and the state of man, is little to the purpose in this argument. Reasonable it is indeed to suppose, according to the scripture account, that in the original frame of man, his capacities and dispositions too were adjusted to the natural law, by which he was to be govern'd; so as that he not only had a full knowledge of these laws, but approved and liked them, and was willing to make them the rules of his behaviour. But it pleased his wife and good maker to give him appetites and passions, as well as reason. It was in his power and option, to be governed by these laws or not, to let his reason rule his appetites and passions, or suffer these to over-rule and sway his reason, and render it a slave to them. And if the first pair of mankind, who were the root and source of all the rest, according to the scripture account, became such slaves; it is no more strange, that their descendants should have a taint of this kind derived to them, than that particular dispositions should be derived from other progenitors, which is a case notorious in common observation. And when men were

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were born with such a *bias*, reason ripened in them but by *degrees*, and *appetite* and *passion* became their *leaders*, before *reason* could; it is no wonder if this corruption was *strengthened*: And men being vicious and depraved themselves, would naturally grow *careless* of the education of their children, and corrupt them more by bad examples; and *company* and evil *customs* must still improve the corruption. Nor was God more *obliged*, in wisdom and goodness, to *break in* upon the *original constitution*, settled by him, to *prevent* these effects, than he was; *not* to have settled such a constitution: Yet when mankind were in such a state of *ignorance* and *corruption*, it was very consonant with his wisdom and goodness, to find out a *remedy* for the calamity, and put mankind on a *new trial*.

CERTAIN it is, however it came about, that the *state* of mankind was *universally* corrupt, at the time *christianity* was published to the world; and had been for all ages before, as far as *history* reaches; and, if *this author* is to be believed, it is not much mended since. Of this corruption *philosophers* complained; though they were much *puzzled* to account for it. And the *scriptural account* will, to any unprejudiced mind, appear more rational than any of *theirs*; though I shall not here enter into that argument. *Gross* and *foolish* idolatry had, at that time, and long before, overspread all nations; one little despised people, the *Jews*, excepted; and they but too much addicted to it, and were *perfectly* cured of this inclination, till their captivity in *Babylon*; not only the barbarous nations, the *Scythians*, *Thracians*, &c. but the most civilized and polite, the *Egyptians*; whence, as some tell us, learning originally came; the *Assyrians*, *Chaldeans*, *Persians*, nay, and *Greeks* and *Romans*; among whom *our author*, I suppose, finds

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finds his celebrated *heroes* and *philosophers*, his bright examples, and peerless teachers of the law of nature.

WITH this idolatry these *heroes* and *philosophers* fell in; and however they might condemn it in their *hearts*, concurred in it, and gave countenance to it, by their *practices*; and, by this means, contributed more to its establishment, than if there had been no such renowned *sages* and *professors* of *wisdom* in the world. Whether this were done out of such *wicked policy*, as this *author* lays at the door of the *priests*, to keep the *vulgar* in ignorance, or want of honesty and courage to condemn and oppose what was so *notorious* a trespass on the *biggest* obligations of the law of nature, or that themselves *knew no better*, let this *author* determine. The fact is undeniable, unless the story be grown *false* or *improbable* by length of time. Nay, to this very day, if travellers deserve any credit, the *polite Chinese*, who had the advantage of being instructed in morality, by such a philosopher as *Confucius*, are very gross idolaters.

NOR does it appear, that the philosophers, either among *Greeks* or *Romans*, set themselves against this reigning idolatry; that they read any *lectures*, or published any *writings* against it: Himself produces nothing of this kind, but makes a very odd excuse, "That the best of men say, and do too, no doubt, *otherwise* than they should, when it is not safe to talk and do as they should:" Which is a plain confession, that these *gross deviations* from the law of nature, were not likely ever to be rectify'd, by the *best* of men in the heathen world; but that they must be *better* men than the best of these, who must engage in the design; such as had the *honest courage* and

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resolution to say, and maintain, and practise what was *unsafe* to themselves, and might expose them to the *utmost danger*; such as understood more of the law of nature, and felt more of its *power* and *influence*, than the men he graces with the *highest characters*, and sets in the *first rank* of mortals.

BUT to call men off from the worship of *false gods*, and teach them the knowledge of the *true*, and rectify misapprehensions concerning *him* and his worship, may, with him, for any thing I know, be *no duty* by the law of nature, especially when it is not safe. If *idolatry* be any breach of that law, the law it self, according to him, is to be measured by its tendency to the *good* of mankind: It can command nothing to their hurt. If therefore men do all the good they can to one another in *society*, and are good *subjects* and *citizens* (this and religion being the same thing) it is no matter though they be *idolaters*: God can receive no *hurt* from this, has no regard to his *own honour*, nor can require that men should. At least, if the *best* of men are convinced of the *folly* and *wickedness* of such practices, but yet believe them consistent with the *good* of *society*, or think it may disturb the *quiet* of *society*, or expose *themselves* to danger, to set these practices in their proper light; they may, in all *good conscience*, forbear; since God can require nothing to the man's *own hurt*, which the *publick good* of *society* does not require. I cannot say these are *this author's* avowed principles; but they look like natural consequences from them: And he quotes, with approbation, the *heathen maxim*, *Deorum injuria, Diis curæ.*

BUT if, with him, morality in this limited sense be the *whole* of religion; with all who have a *right understanding* of the law of nature, *acknowledg-*
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ment of the one true and living God, a suitable veneration of him, devotion to him, and concern that he have his due honour from us, and our fellow-creatures; and that his sovereign authority over all his rational creatures, and right to rule them, as to his unerring reason shall seem meet, be owned by all; will pass for the *biggest* and *most important* points of morality, and branches of the law of nature.

WHAT manifest deviations from many of these laws, the gross idolatries of the heathen world, even the most civilized and refined, were, every eye can see: And how inconsistent with all rational principles of religion the vulgar divinity of the heathen was, is as notorious. This seems both in Greece and Rome to have been that of their poets. And what a multitude, a rabble indeed, of Deities have we here, of different ages, sexes, conditions, ranks, and offices; and these last very trifling and mean ones, to be the objects of worship? But this is not the worst; the character and conduct of the chief of all, even their almighty Jupiter, *hominum pater atque Deorum*; his frolicks, amours, whoredoms, adulteries, incest, rapes, calamities; his transformation of himself into so many shapes, in pursuit of his unbounded lusts, represent him as a *beast of a man*, rather than a god. And when the rest of their deities, male and female, a few only excepted, are copies after this pattern, and many of them were worshipped with very lewd and beastial rites, it is not to be wondred at, if such Deities, and such worship, should corrupt men in other respects, and lead them into a course of the grossest lewdness and debauchery. And was not this in fact the case? Let their satyrists and historians be consulted. And when men, by false maxims and notions in religion, were led into, and settled in a course of other wickedness, is it strange that this should add

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to their *prejudices*, blind their eyes, and keep them clos'd against the shine of natural light, even in other instances? *Vice* naturally clouding the mind, especially about matters of religion and morality, and perverting and corrupting the judgment, by its own *bad taste*, and depraved bent and inclination.

AND suppose philosophers taught *better things*, and practis'd as well as taught them; yet, as long as they left men under the power of such *false principles* in religion, and the influence of such *idolatrous* worship and practices, and comply'd themselves with *common custom* in this case, in breach of the law of nature, they confirm'd men in *these principles*, and the *corrupt practices* growing out of them; and were very unlikely ever to make any great impressions on them, by what they taught, or turn them out of the road in which they were, into that of *virtue*: No, not if they attended their *lectures*, and gave heed to what they said, and understood it; which yet few of the *bulk of mankind*, engag'd in the *business* of life, or pursuit of *pleasures*, were likely to do. Especially since they spoke with no *authority*, were known to be *vain*, very studious of *fame*, and the *reputation* of *wisdom*, and yet at *great difference* among themselves, even in *points of morality*.

BUT, indeed, none among them seem to have been masters themselves of a *complete scheme* of *morality*, nor to have such clear notions of the *nature and perfections* of God, as common christians, who enjoy the benefit of the Gospel-revelation; whatever *objections* this author thinks fit to make to the *obscurity* of scripture stile, from the *figures* abounding in it: Not *Aristotle*, nor *Plato* the divine, nor *Tully*, a genius not inferior to either, and who had the advantage of assisting his own by *their light*, and that of *others*: No, nor *Antoninus*,
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who wrote after him, and after the *light* of the *gospel* had darted some of its rays into the *beaten* world, and help'd to *clear* their air. For this may plainly be perceived to have been the effect, in the *philosophical writings*, which appeared after *christianity* had enlightened the world. They were much improved in *morality*, in comparison of those that went before. And had *Tully* been to have written his book *De officiis*, or *Aristotle* his *Etbicks*, with the advantage of *evangelical light*, I dare say, both had been much more perfect in their kinds than they now are; nor had the *philosophers* blushed to own, that *their* natural light was brightened and cleared by *that* of revelation.

BUT as to those *branches* of *morality*, which are indeed the *beauty*, *excellency*, and *glory* of the *Gospel*, and stand every where to view in it, scarce a *trace* of them appears in any of their writings: That *veneration* for the *Deity*, that *devotedness* to him, that *aspiration* of the soul after the fullest possible *assimilation* to him in his *moral excellencies*, after *union* with him, and consummate *blestness* in him, in which the proper and highest felicity of souls, made after *his image*, must consist: That *deadness* to the world and pleasure of sense; that *detachment* from things below, and *elevation* and *bent* of soul to things above; that *purity* and *spirituality*, that *command* over the *fleshy appetites* and *passions*, in conjunction with the most *extensive* love and *good-will* to all men, of whatever *nation*, *language*, *state*, or *religion*, to their bodies and souls, even to enemies; and that constant *disposition* to forgive these; that are every where *enjoined* and recommended by the *Gospel*, and *shine* out and *surprize* in the lives and examples of the first *ministers* and *professors* of it: These recommend themselves to *unprejudic'd* reason on the proposal,

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appear in such *beauty* and *majesty*, as soon as they appear at all, that the world at once approv'd them, and were struck with admiration. These raise human nature to its *dignity*, and ennoble it indeed; and at once appear highly rational, and *truly* fitted to make men happy. And what man of good sense, and good taste, in reading what is said on this subject, in a book so often cited by *this author*, viz. *Dr. Scott's christian life*; or what is set forth with much more grandeur and strength in *Mr. How's blessedness of the righteous*; and then reading *Aristotle's Ethics*, *Tully's Offices*, *Epietus*, or *Antoninus*, or any other the most *refined* morality among the heathens, even after they had borrow'd light from the Gospel, but would think these last jejune, low, and far beneath the dignity of human nature, in comparison of the *other*? How much more *grand* and *elevated* does virtue look, in the view in which it is set forth by these *christian* divines and philosophers? * “In how beautiful a manner soever *this author* fancies, any of them, may have set forth the *obligations* of morality, and how *irresistibly* soever they may have shewn the necessary connexion between *virtue* and *happiness*, *vice* and *misery*; even so as in his account, cannot but make men highly delighted with the *one*, and create in them a just aversion to the *other*.

THIS talk of the *beauty* of morality, and the natural connexion of *moral* with *natural* good and evil, is a fine thing in speculation, and an undoubted truth in fact; and upon men of a *philosophical* make, may have had some good influence; especially where *more* powerful motives to virtue were wanting. But that it *must* have such an influence on men in general, as to make them fall in love with *virtue*, or give them a just abhorrence

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at *vice*, is talking at random. It may, indeed, if they will with patience attend to it, recommend virtue to their *reason*, as an amiable thing, and give it a conviction of its *tendency* to their happiness, and shew *vice* to their reason in just the opposite form. But is this enough, where the heart is already engaged *against reason*, in the party of *vice*, immers'd in *sensuality*, enslaved to his *appetites* and *passions*, to disengage it, and set the man at liberty? to stop him in his *pleasing* pursuits, break him off from *bewitching* company, and put him on renouncing all his *interests* and *pleasures* for the sake of virtue, and exposing himself to the *censures*, *reproaches*, *contempt*, and *hatred* of all about him? Nay, is it enough to put him on *hearty* struggles to free himself from the dominion of appetite and passion? Alas! he'll hear without any regard, as one dead to such talk, who feels none of its force or influence.

LET this author get together an assembly of *rakes* and *prostitutes*, and set before them the beauty and excellency of *chastity*; of *sots*, and represent to them the beauty and advantages of *temperance*; of *covetous muck-worms*, and paint out to them the excellency of a *publick spirit*, and a generous and flowing *benevolence*, &c. Let him make appear to them the *connexion* of these virtues with *happiness*, and shew how deformed the *contrary vices* are, and how naturally they tend to make men *miserable*. And let him do this with the *evidence* of mathematical demonstration, if he can, and with the *eloquence* and *force* of *Cicero*, and try *both* many converts he'll make; and how many he'll prevail on to repent and amend, and become *truly* virtuous. He'll find virtue, with all its charms, will have *little* attraction, and captivate very few hearts: And let him make *vice* look as *wily* and *odious* as he can, he'll persuade very few of them

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to fall out, or so much as cease to be in love with it. No, the more powerful motives of the gospel; the glories and happiness of heaven, and the horrors of outer darkness, though set before them in the most plain, lively, moving manner, would scarce impress them. Everlasting felicity, and that of the most exalted kind, hardly makes one desire heave within them; and eternal misery hardly wakens in them any concern. Few, very few, are, by these much more powerful motives made truly virtuous and religious; how feeble then must the other be in a state of general vice and corruption, which yet every where, more or less, is the state of mankind?

YET heathen philosophers seem to have no other motives to enforce their moral instructions, and excite men to the love and practice of virtue. Of the happiness and misery of a future life they had but very obscure notions, and seem in no little doubt and uncertainty concerning any after state at all. The vulgar seem to have had more thorough expectations of this than even their philosophers; but their notions of it were all borrowed from their poets, whose account is all fable and fiction, without any foundation in the nature and reason of things. And how should these notions be rectified? These motives rendered more powerful? Not by having recourse to the philosophers: This was likely to have led them into doubt and disbelief, and taken off from the force of the motives they had to practise their duty as far as they knew it.

SUPPOSE now the light of nature (by which, as has been observed, no more in fact can be meant, than that measure of reason or knowledge every man had, or was capable of acquiring as he was circumstanced) might discover as much of natural duty, if it were used to this purpose, as God would mercifully accept, if attended with suitable practices

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yet might not a *revelation*, in these circumstances, be of vast use and benefit to mankind, though not *absolutely necessary*? A revelation that would call men off from their *superstition* and *idolatry*; give them great light into the *nature* and *perfections* of God; furnish them with a *complete scheme* and *draught* of moral or natural duty; excite to the performance of this duty by *motives* most rational and powerful; tender them *helps supernatural*, to assist in subduing strong propensions to vice both *natural* and *acquired*; and prescribe *means*, fitted in their own nature; and, why should it not be added, by *superadded influence* from on high, to make all this duty familiar to the mind, and *facilitate* the practice of religion and morality? Is there any thing in this supposition *unworthy* of God? Or in such a *revelation*? Must it *impeach* his wisdom and goodness, if in such circumstances, mankind are not left, without any such *subsidy* or *succour*, to the force, the *naked* force of their enfeebled reason, and the powerful *biasses* of appetite and passion, to find out their way to happiness, and pursue after it? Men proud and conceited of their own *sufficiency* may reckon such a revelation a *vain*, a *needless* thing; but *those* who best understand the extent of the laws of nature, and the *weakness* of the powers of nature, and the *manifold* and *great* difficulties in their way to happiness, will esteem it a vast privilege, and be very thankful for it; I mean, when they see *proper evidence* that it is divine, and are not required to believe at a venture, nor *renounce* their reason to enjoy the benefit of a better guide.

AND, surely, it is no little benefit to mankind, by such a *revelation*, to have assurance of the *pardon* of sin and *reconciliation* to an offended God, that the sinful mind may be relieved against that *distrust* and *dread* of God, which naturally grow out of a
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sense of guilt; to have *pledges* of those favours, and a plain way marked out to become *interested* in them. For though *this author* has taken all the care he can, to *rid* the minds of men of all uneasiness on this account, and represent the blessed God as *all goodness*, incapable of receiving *injury* from his creatures, or *resenting* their disobedience, and would persuade us, that all *dread* of divine displeasure, and concern to have him *pacified* towards offending creatures, is the effect of *weak* and *silly* superstition; yet the connexion between guilt and *those fears*, is too reasonable, natural, and deeply founded, to be rooted up by his *imaginary* demonstrations.

It has been made *evident*, I would hope, already, that God *must* esteem and honour his *own* perfections, and must bind upon his creatures a like *esteem* and *honour*; I mean in proportion to their different nature and capacity: He would not act agreeably to the *eternal reason* and *nature* of things, if he did not. And in his *laws* he must secure this dutiful regard, and in them and his administration shew himself *displeased* with those who refuse to pay it. His high authority, for its *own* sake, and securing the ends of his government, he *must* maintain; or, which is all one, this becomes him. And he *must* shew a concern to *vindicate* it, if it be slighted and trampled on. It must be *his right* to govern whatever creatures he makes capable of proper government, and give them *laws* for the regulation of their conduct. If by reason of the *perfection* of his nature, the *reason* of things must be regarded in the *framing* his laws; if regard to the *good* of the governed will have a share herein, yet the *truth* and *reason* of things require also, that his *right*, as supreme ruler, be *claimed*, *asserted*, and *maintained*: And how shall they be

maintained, in case of *violation* or *contempt*, if no resentment be shewn hereupon, or the offender have *no reason* to dread his displeasure? And, why has he, in the frame of nature, *connected* misery with vice, but to deter men *from* it before-hand, and to make them smart *for* it, if they will not be deterr'd and with-held from it? Or, is this *all* they have reason to fear? Is *disobedience* to the supreme ruler, and so good and kind a ruler, as he appears in the whole frame of his laws, no part of *their* guilt who throw off his government, the sense of which must never *enter* into their guilty reflections? Is it no crime to defy the authority of God? If it *be not*, his authority is a meere cypher; if it *be*, it is natural that the sense of guilt bring on uneasiness on *this* account, and give men pain for having *injured* God. And can they think him *destitute* of all regard to his own authority, and *void* of all resentment of such carriage? Is it fit he should be so? Is his authority deserving no regard, by *them* or *himself*? If *so*, it is really *none*, or *next to none*. If *not*, a sense of having injur'd him herein must awaken a *dread* of his *resentment* in the mind; such dread then is not the mere effect of *superstition*, the *peculiar foible*, it seems, of mankind, but is the plain *dictate* of *reason*. It is *natural* to fear divine displeasure, upon disobedience to *his* command, and the contempt of *his* high authority, implied therein; it being most *fit* and *reasonable*, that he should *assert* and *maintain* this authority; and, in case of such neglect, or contempt, should *vindicate* it.

CERTAIN it is, that *these fears* have been *general* among men; and if they be the effect of *superstition*, it is such as *this author* has no way to cure, it seems, but by rooting *all fear* of God out of the minds of men; which, as certain and evident as he takes *his* principles to be, they will never be
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able to effect. Men *naturally* will, because it is highly reasonable they *should*, fear the displeasure of God, upon contemning his authority, and injuring him in his *sovereign rights*, by breaking his laws. They will hereupon have naturally a *diffidence* in him, and *jealousy* of him, and *anxiety* in themselves, when guilt stares them in the face, and much *perplexity* of thought, *whether* he will, and if they have any hope, *how* he may be reconciled. He will not stand to their view in the form of an *earthly parent* or *sovereign*, a being of the *same kind*, having wants and weakneses in common with them, to which he may be liable as well as *they*, and in which he may be assisted by them, in turn, as well as be assisting to them; but as one *infinitely above* all want and weakness, in no dependance on *any other*, but having *all the world* in dependance upon him, whose authority is *original* and *undervied*, held from none, nor upon any conditions (though guided in its exercise, by the *highest perfection* of reason) and *guarded* with power none can controul or resist. Contempt of *his* authority therefore, shewn by *wilful disobedience* to his laws, *revolt* from him, and *rebellion* against him, must appear to them as *beinous injury*, such as they never can repair; his *resentments*, hereupon, they must fear, unless they are sure he is void of *all regard* for his authority, which to the reason and nature of things seems flatly *contradictory*. They must therefore be concerned and inquisitive, *whether*, and by *what means*, his anger may be turned away. Nor will it appear to *them* a matter of such *certainity*, as *this author*, and those he cites, would represent it, that upon a sinner's repentance, *reconciliation* to God will at once ensue; as will hereafter more fully be shewn. And though from the *goodness* of God, the *common bounties* of his providence, the *patience* he exercises towards sinners, they may

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may hope there still is room for pardon, they will yet, at times, have many doubts and misgivings; a revelation therefore from heaven, assuring that God is propitious to his offending creatures, may again be in friendship with them, and shewing how his favour may be regained, must be an unspeakable blessing and benefit to mankind; and the greater, if this revelation makes known to this purpose what natural light could not discover.

So that admitting*, that in the state antecedent to revelation, God required no more from his creatures than was knowable to them, and practicable by them; yet, since theirs was certainly a state of great ignorance and corruption, a revelation must, on all these accounts, be a great blessing, and gracious vouchsafement of God to mankind, viz. as it gives a more perfect account of the nature and perfections of God, than is elsewhere to be met with; as it sets before mankind a complete system of moral duties, or natural religion, such as is not to be met with in any, or all the philosophers of Greece, Rome, or any other country, much less is to be had by certain deduction from self-evident principles, by the force of every man's reason; as it furnishes more powerful motives to practise the duties of natural religion, as it tenders supernatural aids, and presents means for their better performance; and finally, as it removes all doubts of the guilty and misgiving mind, concerning God's being reconcileable to sinners, and assuring them, that he is ready to forgive them on their sincere repentance, and their suing out a pardon, in the way there prescribed. If men may be happy without it, and so far it be not necessary; yet if they may more easily be happy, and capable of greater happiness with it, this is a privilege for which they ought to be thankful.

* *Vide* Page 473, 474.

§ II. *Of the use of reason in examining into the evidences of a revelation, and enquiring into its meaning. Whether it will hence follow, that a revelation must be useless and needless?*

REASON, or *human understanding*, is, no doubt, that faculty, by which mankind must know and distinguish *truth* from *falsehood*; and reason is never to be renounced by a rational. What the reason or intelligent faculty in man pronounces *certainly true*, the man can never believe to be *false*, nor admit that to be *true*, which it pronounces *certainly false*. In this point, and in his general account of reason, and the exercise of the understanding in enquiring out *truth*, I shall have little dispute with him.

THAT man has an *understanding* or *faculty* to enquire into *truth*; and that all men have knowledge of *some truth*, and are capable of having more, *all revelation* supposes: It were utter impertinence but on this supposition. And as the *human understanding* was given man to search out and discover *truth*, and distinguish between that and *falsehood*, it must have some *certain tests* for this purpose; and as *religion* is what man above all things is concerned to know, there must be some certain tests to distinguish *truth* from *falsehood* here. And before men admit a revelation as from God, they not only *may*, but *should* examine the evidences of its being divine, which, as *this author* rightly says, it cannot be, if it *teach* any thing, *enjoin* any thing, which sound reason pronounces *unworthy* of God.

CERTAIN too it is, and as *this author* rightly observes, all *divines*, and all *parties* among christi-

ans in fact own, that *reason* must be used in discovering the *sense* of revelation, unless we would come at the *sense* without understanding. And if the *literal sense* implies what is plainly *absurd*, *immoral*, *impious*, reason must depart from *that* *sense*, and put an interpretation on the text that will consist with *known truth*; and that whether it regard *doctrines* or *precepts* of life. Revelation was not designed to lay reason by, and render it *useless*, or challenge belief, however reason *oppose* and *repugn*, or however certain truths *naturally* known contradict; it was given to assist reason, not to extinguish it, or lay it by.

AND indeed it is every man's *own* reason or understanding, that in the *derniere resort* must settle his *principles*, and direct his *practice*; there being no medium between a man's judging *for himself*, and following *that* judgment, and his resigning himself to the judgment and direction of *others*. Nor is it possible for any one *really* to think otherwise of things than they appear to his *own* understanding. But this judgment of things is frequently *wrong*; and those who have the strongest natural faculties, and exercise them most, yet fall into frequent *mistakes*.

AND if "self-evident truths are the foundations of all our knowledge, as *he* asserts"; if when by "intermediate ideas we come to the knowledge of any other truths, by perceiving the *evident connexion* of all these with one another, and the fundamental *self-evident* truth, this is *demonstrative* evidence; if only the *likely* connexion, this is only *probable* evidence; if our faculties, duly attended to, *cannot* deceive us;" (or in other words, if when we reason rightly we cannot reason wrong) "and all wrong reasoning is the effect of *rashness*;" yet certain it is, there is abundance

of *deceit*, and *wrong judgment* and *false reasoning* in fact in the world. What is self-evident must evidence it self to *all men*, upon comparing the ideas; what does not thus evidence it self is *not* self-evident; and strong *conceits* often supplies the room of evidence. Men are too often in haste to draw their *conclusion*, and have not patience to examine the connexion of the intermediate ideas; they often think that evidence *certain*, which is but likely at best, and often what comes much short of it. And I am much mistaken, if *this author*, who understands *reason* so well, and talks so triumphantly of it, and the *sufficiency* of *natural light*, has not in all these respects deceived himself: He has taken that for *self-evident* which is *not* self-evident, and that for *demonstration* which is *not* demonstration, nor hardly *probability*.

THOUGH *reason* must *not* be renounced, therefore, nor should men believe at a *venture*, and without all enquiry; yet a *due* attention to the *frailties* of human nature, the *biasses* on most men in their search after truth, the *warp* given to their minds by inclinations and aversions; *unreasonable* regard to those they love, and opposition to those they disesteem; the *extremes* into which they are apt to run in maintenance of favourite sentiments, and decrying and running down what they dislike, &c. would teach and recommend a *little modesty*; and persons surrounded with so many *difficulties* in finding truth, and peculiarly in matters of religion and morality, so apt to be misled by principles *within*, and seducers *without*, should be thankful for the *help* revelation brings their reason in these circumstances, and not cry up their reason to discredit revelation, and decry it as *useless*; especially a revelation that offers no *violence* to reason, nor^b forbids men the use of their *own* understanding in judging of religious

gious matters, but the quite contrary, as *this author*^a cites many texts to prove, *Christian revelation* does.

L *et* reason have all the authority it ought to have, but let men remember their *own* is limited, impaired, imperfect, and liable to many defects; and let revelation be allowed *subsidiary* to it, and what may correct mens *mistakes*, and improve their *understandings* in religion, though it cannot contradict any certain truth naturally known, or any certain dictate of right reason. Let not men borrow light from it, and then *blame* the sufficiency of natural light without it, and throw it by as useless; at least, if *themselves* are above reaping advantage from it, let them not endeavour to make *those* out of love with it, or persuade them to despise it as useless, who have a more *modest opinion* of their own faculties, and would *otherwise* gladly use the help it offers.

B *ut* the consequence drawn by him, from his account of reason, and its use in religion, is what I chiefly find fault with in this *chapter*, which is, to make revelation *void* of all authority, and perfectly *useless*. "Men cannot, says he, *at once*, be governed by reason and revelation; for if "men are governed by *revelation*; they must take "all *on trust*; if by *reason*; they must admit no "thing farther than *they see reasonable*." Again, "Either men are *entirely* to be governed by reason, and then you destroy all authority what "ever, even that of *apostles*; or not governed by "it, and then you cannot shew the absurdity of "that *implicit faith*, required by the (*Roman*) "Catholick church." Again, "Where men "depart from the *letter* of revelation, to find out "a sense agreeable to *reason*, it is *that*, and not

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^a Page 171.
177, 178.

^b Page 164.

^c Page 187.

^d Page

“the authority of the book, that determines them; for were men governed by the revelation, they must take the words in the most plain, obvious, and literal meaning, how absurd soever it appear to their carnal reason.” So that if, in finding out the sense of revelation, reason must guide, revelation, according to him, can be of no authority; and if reason guide us not, we must believe blindfold, and take the words as they lie, how absurd a meaning soever they carry in them.

THIS appears not to me any necessary consequence, from self-evident principles. Revelation can, indeed, have no authority against true reason; for then it must have authority against truth it self. What right reason dictates, must be true, and nothing can be true that is repugnant to it. The authority of reason and revelation are both divine, and therefore cannot contradict each other; and that of reason is in nature first. Such authority as should render human understanding useless, or claim belief blindfold, Christianity never did pretend to, nor the first ministers employ'd in its publication. They were sent out to improve the knowledge of mankind in matters of religion, and rectify their mistakes, to awaken their thinking powers, and call them into exercise about these matters; not to lay these powers asleep, or put out mens natural light. Nor did they require men to assent without reason, or without putting a meaning on their words, nor to put a sense on them unreasonable or absurd; though, if they perceived their meaning was mistaken, or men made a difficulty of receiving what they taught, no doubt, they let them right, or explain'd to their satisfaction, without ever requiring them to give up their understandings, or believe without them. So that he does not put the matter fairly, when he says, “Revelation requires the taking all things on

“trust.”

trust; and that if men are governed by revelation, they must take the words in the literal, plain, obvious meaning, how absurd so ever it appears to their carnal reason. For expressions figurative cannot be taken in the literal sense in any author, without making nonsense of them; and, in such case, not the literal meaning, but *some other*, is the plain and obvious meaning.

But, indeed, the authority of reason and revelation are so far from standing in opposition to each other, that they help to their mutual confirmation and establishment. For when, upon enquiry, reason is furnished that a revelation is divine, approves what it teaches and enjoins, as *reasonable* and fit to come from God, and is convinced by the *miraculous attestations* to it, that it is from God; truths thus discovered, attested, and approved, come upon the mind with double weight and force. The voice of reason pronounces the revelation divine, and the divine revelation, well attested, strengthens the voice of reason; and their united light shines in upon the mind, with the greater clearness and power.

For while the apostles were on the earth, and carried the light of the gospel into the *barbarous* world, and mankind, by the knowledge they had of God and morality, and what was communicated to them by the apostles, found the doctrines they taught and confirmed by miracles, were worthy to come from God, I can't see that they acted an unreasonable part, in giving themselves up to their instruction, and taking in what farther information they gave them in matters of religion, without a scrupulous diffidence. Such trust in teachers, so fully proved divine, is a thing quite different from the implicit faith demanded by the *Roman Church*. But, since these teachers are on earth no more,

and have only left us their instructions in writing, men must use their understanding in settling the sense of scripture, but I cannot think this destroys its authority. This is divine, though men must act as men, in finding out what it says to them; nor can it otherwise speak to them, at all, either with or without authority. This is not being govern'd by reason *entirely*, but by reason and revelation together, supposing the reason followed to be right reason; but if it be not, it is being govern'd *neither* by reason nor revelation. Indeed, reason must *entirely* guide in examining into the evidences of revelation: it is no farther to be owned, than it appears to the unprejudiced understanding, worthy of God in it self, and duly attested. In enquiring into its meaning, men must make use of *common sense*, and their best *judgment*, and must admit nothing that is manifestly contradictory to any truth certainly known, since truth, however made known, can never contradict truth. But where no such contradiction appears, it is no *absurdity* to receive truths as *divinely* revealed, which are not, by reason, deducible from self-evident principles, upon the *authority* of the revelation, whether these be facts or doctrines. So that we must neither be *entirely* governed by reason, in case of a revelation, nor by revelation, but by *revelation and reason together*; and *thankfully* use revelation, as assisting to reason, and make the *best use* of reason we can, in enquiring into the sense of revelation, without taking any thing on trust from *church guides*, or believing what they tell us we must believe, *right or wrong*, whether reason *assents* or *opposes*, which is the *implicit faith* demanded by the *Romish church*; and without taking the revelation in the *literal* sense; or that which first offers, how *absurd* soever it appear to carnal reason. For whether reason be *carnal* or

not, it is impossible a rational being should ever receive that for truth, which, to his own judgment, after the best enquiry he can make, appears to carry absurdity and contradiction in it to known truth. A man's reason must not be renounced, and yet revelation may be assistant to it, and in points where reason can't determine, and yet does not contradict, there it is very fit and reasonable the revelation should.

BUT he not only labours, by his discourse of reason, to destroy the authority of revelation, but to prove it wholly *useless*. Reason can do every thing without it, for which it can serve. Some "truths in religion," says he, "are so evident, that all must agree in them. By these all others must be tried: They are therefore the *tests*, by which to distinguish between truth and falsehood in religion. This by the cry of all parties, is what the nature of things tells us is worthy or unworthy of God: And if reason can tell us what is worthy of having God for its author, is not this telling every thing that God can be supposed to require? Again, says he, "It is our duty, before we embrace any *instituted* religion, to examine, by that light which God has given us, into every part of it, and, after a scrupulous trial, pass sentence. And if this be man's duty, must he not be able, antecedently to revelation, to distinguish between truth and falsehood in all religious matters? And if this be the case, of what use is revelation? None in the world, with regard to the discovery of truth: It cannot carry us one step farther than our reason may and must; it seems, that we may try revelation. If this be not the consequence drawn by him in terms, it is what he plainly drives at in all his talk of *this sort*."

But admitting all this for truth, revelation may yet be of great use to mankind. All that may know their duty, will not take the requisite pains; and all who do know their duty, don't set themselves to practise it. Indeed, *none* practise up to what they know. At the time the gospel was first made publick, by Jesus and his apostles, all mankind were very corrupt in practice. Even his philosophers fell in with common superstitions, in notorious violation of the laws of nature, if they had such *comprehensive* knowledge of them, as is pretended. And some more powerful principle than this knowledge, (if they had it) and the excellency of virtue, seems to have been very necessary, to carry them against the stream, and much more to reclaim the bulk of mankind from their idolatrous practices, and other vices. And had this knowledge been sufficient to direct the practice of philosophers, and put them on reforming the world, still consciousness of guilt must have occasioned some misgivings. If the light of nature, with those hints of revelation that were transmitted from generation to generation, might, in some measure, remove these doubts, a revelation that proposed stronger motives to practise what they knew, and clear up all doubts concerning the pardon of sin, must have been of exceeding benefit to mankind, were all men so wise and knowing, as, antecedently to revelation, to be well apprised what God could require.

But, in truth, such knowledge as he supposes, is no way necessary antecedently to revelation, in order to examine into its original. Certain it is, that the *brutish* world, at the publication of Christianity, knew little of the nature of things, which he makes the tests of truth in religious matters. Some sense of Duty, indeed, seems to have been universally diffused through the *brutish* world; but how gross and mistaken were their sentiments! How confused their

their notions? How dim their light? *Some* traces of the laws of nature they had amongst them. They had the notions of justice, truth, honesty, gratitude, compassion to the miserable, and the fitness of all these; that they were reasonable in themselves, and becoming mankind in their circumstances. But how imperfect a scheme had they of the whole of moral duties? But when the light of revelation opened to view the nature and perfections of God, their understandings might, at the same time, be cleared, and that light, which, as *this author* tells us, shines upon every one from God, might help them at once to see, what was before to them unknown, especially when miracles awakened their attention, and called home their minds to these matters. And as what they knew of the law of nature, appeared, to their own reason, fit to be practised, and fit to be required of God; so must the other duties, which before they knew not, when set in view by revelation. Himself tells us, once and again, that men agree in these points, when known; I suppose he means, as animals in the pulse of the heart and arteries, or all men in their judgment of the whiteness of snow, &c. Upon their discovery, they at once procure assent, and appear in their own light, fit to be practised by men, and enjoined of God. Though therefore they were unknown before, upon being discovered, they might appear what they were; they must come recommended to their reason, and they would hereupon be furnished with evidence, that they were from God, and help'd to all the needful tests whereby to know the revelation was divine; I mean, the internal ones. And when the first ministers of the gospel, by operations, manifestly miraculous, proved that they carried a divine commission, this new light breaking in upon their minds, must, in a manner, constrain assent, that the revelation

lation was divine: And this, though there was no such *comprehensive* knowledge, as *this author* would make necessary antecedently to revelation, if men would shew a *due value* for truth, and the *dignity* of human nature, in examining into its *originals*. The *Christian* revelation would bring light along with it, for *this purpose*. The *highest value* for truth would be shewn, by *thankfully* embracing it, when thus offered and recommended; and the *highest regard* for the dignity of human nature, by receiving a religion from God, evidently fitted to refine, improve, elevate, and perfect it; as their own reason, upon understanding it, must tell them *Christianity* did, and therefore was worthy of God; and, by the miracles bearing testimony to it, was plainly proved to have God for its *author*. For he who sinks all religion into *patriotism*, talks very preposterously, when he would persuade men to *disbelieve* *Christianity*, out of *pretended* regard to the dignity of human nature, unless human nature be *dignified* by stubborn unbelief of *Christianity*, however *groundless* and *unreasonable*.

So that all that knowledge of *whatever* is worthy to come from God, which *this author* makes previously necessary to revelation, and which being supposed, in his imagination, makes revelation *unnecessary*, is not so needful to go before it as he conceits; and antecedently to the *Christian* revelation, such knowledge was not diffused through the *heathen world*; no, not the *philosophical* part of it. And yet was *Christian* revelation very *reasonably* believed, without trespassing on any of that duty, which a *just value* for truth, and a *just regard* to the dignity of human nature requires; unless by truth he means *opposition* to revelation; and, by the dignity of human nature, a *proud conceit* of the sufficiency of the human mind, to discover and perform *all the duty*, either

God

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God or man can require, without being *rebellious* to God for any *supernatural* light or aid. Of this the *Wine* heathen world were very commendably *guiltless*, and multitudes of them gladly received that *Revelation*, and those *successors*, christian revelation brought them; though, to his brother *philosophers*, the preaching the gospel was *foolishness*.

when this offered and recommended; and the highest regard for the dignity of human nature, by receiving a religion from God, evidently fitted to

CHAP. III.

Of his Argument against the christian Revelation in particular.

THE arguments of our author against all revelation in general, having been considered, it will be proper to consider what he offers in particular against the christian. For though he sometimes pretends *respect* for christianity, and really to design the *honour* of revelation, and professes to take it for granted, "that there is *sufficient evidence* of the person's being sent from God, who published it; and that the *divine person*, by living up to what he taught, has set a *noble example*, and was highly exalted for so doing; and we, if we use our best endeavours, may expect a *suitable reward*; On this is all *grimace*. His main and manifest design is to ruin the *credit* of christianity, and reduce us all to his law of nature. And therefore by many arguments, he makes a direct attack on it. Some of these, indeed, militate against revelation in general, though chiefly aimed at christianity; others point at that in particular. The first class con-

900. *His Arguments against a written Revelation.*
tains four arguments: *First*, The difficulty of un-
derstanding, and the uncertainty of the meaning of a
revelation, communicated by words or writing. *Se-*
condly, The defect of proof, that such a revelation is
from God. *Thirdly*, That christianity has positive
institutions in it. *Fourthly*, That it is not an uni-
versal religion.

¶ II. Of his Arguments against Christianity,
militating against all Revelation.

Sub §. I. His Pretense that a Revelation commu-
nicated by Speech or Writing, especially in old and
dead languages, must be unintelligible, or of un-
certain meaning, to common Readers, especially
in Length of Time, examined.

ON the first of these topicks, the author rather
cavils than argues; and, in truth, makes
speech and writing, in a manner useless, for the mu-
tual conveyance of men's thoughts. He libels all
ancient learning: Nor seems he much concerned,
indeed, what his arguments destroy, or whether
they reach, if he can but overturn revelation and
christianity. But let us hear him.

“ It is scarce possible that the doctrines taught,
“ or practices originally used in any institution,
“ should continue long the same: Nothing being
“ more easy, than to vary the signification of
“ words.” The signification of words in dead
languages, certainly, is not thus variable. This
must remain, since the death of these languages,
what it was whilst they were living. In this, an
institution deliver'd in a dead language, has an ad-
vantage over one in a living one, which is con-
tinually varying. If the words of it are intelli-
gible

gible now, their signification cannot vary from what it was when written. Some may, indeed, mistake their meaning, and some may pervert it; but the mistake and perversion may easily be rectify'd, by having recourse to the original institution. Or, must mankind make no laws; nor keep any records, because, through the varying signification of words, they may be mistaken? Is there no way to come at, and settle their true and original meaning? Were the laws of the twelve tables useless in Rome in the days of Augustus, because words varied in their signification, from what it was, when these laws were first collected and digested in these tables? Is not the true meaning of our old Saxon and Norman laws to be found out, because they are written in dead languages? And if usages now vary from what they were in those times, is it impossible, or indeed difficult, were it needful, to reduce them to the primitive standard? Does not this author spend laudable pains in reducing some words, abused by christians, to the primitive standard? Can such a master of reasoning be supposed to have taken these pains to no purpose, and attempted impossibilities? But if he can set the people right, in the meaning of the abused words, Church, Bishop, Deacon, Priest, Clergy, &c. why may not others set them right in other abus'd words? And why then should this be made an argument against the scriptures of truth, or the christian revelation contained in them? Is nothing to be received as a revelation from God, the meaning of which may possibly be mistaken or perverted? Are not men liable to mistakes, even about natural duty? I am mistaken, if this author himself be not grossly out in these matters. And spite of the clearness and sufficiency of the light of nature, have not designing men

led multitudes astray from it, both in ages antecedent to christianity, and consequent upon it? Has this been all owing to the use of language? Did never any go astray, or vary a tittle from the law of nature, who followed their own light? If the nature of things be *invariable*, and the duties naturally resulting from them, men's notions of the nature of things, are very various; nay, the same men's notions often vary from themselves. Even natural religion may, by the *same reason*, be proved not to be from God, because men may mistake it.

BUT words, it seems, are arbitrary marks of men's ideas; and their meaning, as well as the words themselves, are continually changing; and it is impossible to fix one or the other. It is plain, from the innumerable verbal disputes amongst men, how different their ideas are, though they use the *same words*. But what means he, when he makes words such arbitrary marks? If it be, that there is no necessary connexion between these signs, and the ideas signified by them, this is very true; but no reason why words must be unintelligible. Or means he, that every man has it in his power to make a language for himself, and chuse what words he'll make the marks of his ideas, this is also true; but this language will only serve for himself, 'twill convey none of his sentiments to others: The same might be said, if he uses words in common use, in a meaning of his own. And custom and common use settle the signification of words, however arbitrary in their original, and so far fix the sense for the time: And by consulting cotemporary authors, and comparing the author's own language with it self, his meaning may, surely, be ascertained. For, to say that the meaning of words in common use cannot be ascertained, is to make mutual converse utterly

utterly impracticable, and all writing useless. Men at this rate cannot understand one another. It is true, there are many verbal disputes in the world, and the same words are used by several persons, with different ideas. But these are generally about matters of abstracted science and speculation, not in matters of ordinary and common concern. And if the meaning of words may be mistaken, men may also mistake about the nature of things. Human reason, as himself owns, is not infallible, though the nature of things may be invariable; and that judgment which is according to it, must be right. And whatever was once the true sense of words, must ever be so. In this respect they are invariable too, though their sense may be mistaken, and words vary both in themselves and signification, more than things do.

SAY that persons using the same words, may annex different ideas to them, and that a speaker or writer's words, may be misapprehended by his hearers or readers; what then? Must we put an end to all converse by speech or writing? burn all ancient laws and records? throw away all books, turn mutes, and sit down satisfied with the light and entertainment our own thoughts may give us? and neglect some of the principal duties of social life? What will then become of that important benevolence which goes so far with him, in filling up the duty of mankind, both to God and one another? Will not this render his valued philosophers, and all their magnified performances, in explaining the natural law, quite useless? May not these be words with different ideas, from what readers or hearers annex to them? If their ideas be more or fewer, "what confusion must this occasion?" Especially the Greek philosophers, who, he tells us, from Mr. Locke, almost every one uses a distinct language.

language, though the *same* words? And since words and their meaning are thus continually changing, how shall even *Tully* be found in *Tully*? Who shall fix or ascertain the sense of his words? Unless words are liable to this uncertainty and change, when they convey the mind of God, not when they convey the mind of men? But, did not the apostles themselves, at the end of three years, converse with *Jesus* himself, yet mistake the end of his mission? If they had the *same* ideas of what he said with himself, how could this be? And if they could so grossly mistake the meaning of his words, well may we, if we are to be governed by words, and not the unalterable reason of things. But sure this author, who is so thoroughly acquainted with the nature of things, cannot be ignorant, that prejudice often bars the mind, against the clearest light, and the plainest words. Such prejudice the apostles were under. They, with the rest of the Jews, expected a temporal *Messias*; and whatever words their master said to them, concerning his mission, they would naturally take them in their own prejudicate sense, till this was rooted out; which he thought not fit to do all at once, nor wholly till he furnished them with full powers for their office. But was not the end of his mission then made very plain and intelligible to them? And is it not now obvious to all who read the scriptures? Because the apostles, in these peculiar circumstances, took the words of *Jesus* not as he meant, but as they thought he should, and hoped he *did* mean; is this an argument that all words are naturally and ordinarily, and indeed, always liable to mis-construction, and apt to lead men into mistakes? If not, it only proves, that under the power of prejudice, or by neglect and inadvertence;

tence, words may be mistaken. And what will he get by that? The light of nature may misguide men as well as words, and the uneven fall of nature of things is no more *friendly* to men who can judge of it by their imperfect reason only, against error, than a written revelation.

THE like is to be said of the apostle not apprehending, at first, the extent of their commission, nor that evident truth, as he calls it, *That every one who fears God, and works righteousness, shall be accepted of him.* They were Jews, who had been bred up in another set of notions, of which they were not at once to be dispossessed. Multitudes, therefore, under no such prejudice, mistake the extent of *this* commission? Is it not obvious and plain to every reader? But when he adds, *Till "this happened, (viz. Peter's vision) through fall "of the Holy Ghost, he confined salvation to the "name of a person, viz. that of Christ. There is no other name under heaven, given amongst men, whereby we may be saved.* I confess I see not what he drives at. All the apostle means, or can fairly be made to mean in this expression, is, that Jesus is the only Saviour of sinners. He does not say, nor intimate, that by this name *merely*, any shall be saved, much less that salvation is *confined* to those who mention this name; though, as we shall have occasion after to observe, that salvation in the fullest sense may be peculiar to christians. And I wish this Gentleman may never have occasion to repent in vain, of this idle and silly *basket*, on the Holy Ghost, and salvation by Jesus.

BUT, says he, *And frequent mistakes "must be in translating the antiquated language "of a people living in ages and countries far re- "more, and who affected hyperbolical, parabolical, "allegorical, mystical, and typical ways of expres-*

10th sing themselves; and as opposite to the usage
 11th in other parts, as the East is to the West. Espe-
 12th cially since it is necessary here to have the
 13th knowledge of manners, customs, traditions, phi-
 14th losophy, *polity*, civil and ecclesiastical polity, of all
 15th which common people know as little, as they do
 16th of the original language; and having very ob-
 17th scure and incompetent conceptions of the prin-
 18th cipal words and phrases used in such versions,
 19th their religion must be a very odd jumble of con-
 20th fused and inconsistent notions. Were it to de-
 21th pend on words, and their precise meaning, and
 22th not on things themselves, they must, in a man-
 23th ner, be govern'd by *sounds*." It must be own-
 24th ed, that to make a perfect translation of books
 25th in an antiquated language, requires a comprehen-
 26th sive knowledge of manners, customs, &c. and tho'
 27th many are employ'd in the translation, and have
 28th the revival of each other's part, there may be some
 29th mistakes; especially if the language abounds with
 30th figures, as the *jewish* and other *eastern* languages
 31th do. And where the translators are wrong, common
 32th readers cannot be right. But will it hence follow,
 33th that they are *incapable* of coming at due informa-
 34th tion in all necessary things, in which they may have
 35th all reasonable assurance that all translations agree,
 36th and express the right meaning of the original? And
 37th yet is not this the known case, as to translations
 38th of the scripture? If, according to their different
 39th schemes and systems, men put different interpreta-
 40th tions on passages of scripture, yet in their transla-
 41th tion from the original they agree, and give the
 42th same meaning to the original words. And this
 43th holds good in all things essential to christian religion.
 44th If in the ancient history, the ancient prophecies,
 45th the *jewish polity* and *rites*, there may be mistakes
 46th in the translation, or things not easily intelligible
 47th at this distance; there is no need christians should
 48th understand

understand them: And the same may be said of disputes raised by speculative men, about some things contained in the christian revelation. But what is necessary to be known of the divine nature and perfection, the way of salvation by Christ, the duties of the christian life, and maxims to their performance, with all the essentials of christian worship, are very plain in all translations; nor need the vulgar be such critics, as he suggests, to understand all that concerns them to know in christian revelation.

If the prose writings of the Greeks and Romans abound not with such figurative expressions as our sacred writings, yet does not the right translating them require an equal knowledge of manners, customs, &c. Cannot their meaning, therefore, be given in a translation? If they are not impossible to be understood, neither is the proper rendering them in another language impossible; and if this be done, may not the unlearned in the language come at their sense; especially where they have reasonable assurance that all translators agree? And why must the sacred writings of christians then be necessarily misunderstood, in passages where all translations agree? If speculative men have introduced technical terms, or made such of scriptural expressions, "which, he says", are of such various "significations," common christians need give themselves little concern about them, but leave them to the wranglers of the schools, the metaphysical men who make a science of divinity, a *res arguta*: Such speculations have little to do with real religion. If by hearkening to such speculations, christian people have, in all ages, been taken off from more momentous matters; so have other people been seduced, by men of science, from a due regard to the religion of nature, to which

he would by this talk, as he pretends, reduce us.

No, is there any need, because common people may not thoroughly understand some words and phrases in a version of the scripture, that their notions of the great things of religion which they are concerned to know, "should be all jumble and confusion, or that in religion they should be wholly governed by mere sounds;" seeing they not only may, but in fact do, understand the nature of God and religion, and all the duties of the natural law, and whatever else concerns them to know; and that much better and more perfectly, than they could have done by their own unassisted faculties; or indeed, any assistances the world had, antecedently to this revelation, from philosophy or otherwise.

"BUT, says he, must not differences be unavoidable, as long as men found their religion on words, and not the eternal reason, and unalterable relations of things, obvious to the meanest capacity?" It is strange, that the eternal reasons, and unalterable relations of things, should be so very obvious to every, and even the meanest capacity; and yet that christians, using the assistance of revelation, must found their religion on sounds and unmeaning words; or in other words, mean nothing by the religion they profess. Can't God, by words, teach men the knowledge of things? Or, not by such words as are contained in scripture? Or, if these words be sometimes mistaken, and differences thereupon ensue, is this peculiar to the scripture revelation? Do men, who profess to be guided by the unalterable reasons and relations of things, ever mistake nor differ? Were there no diversities of sentiments, no disputes or differences amongst his applauded philosophers? If the reasons and relations

of

of things be *unalterable*, the reason of man is *imperfect and fallible*; nor do men always judge of things as they are. And where *mistakes* are, no wonder if there are also *differences*. And as *obvious* as he makes the *unalterable* nature of things, yet *mistakes* about them are not impossible; men may through ignorance, or prejudice, or *negligence* and *rashness*, judge amiss concerning the nature and reason of things, or argue wrong from it. This the experience of the whole world evinces to be but too common; *revelation* has in this respect nothing peculiar to it; philosophy is liable to the same inconveniencies. Nor did the reason and relations of things, though so obvious, in his account, to the *meanest capacities*, prevent mistakes and differences among those of greatest capacity. The numerous *sects* of philosophers plainly make this appear; and those who learnt any from *philosophers*, must as much found their religion on *words* as christians can; for they all taught by words, and hardly two of the *Greeks*, as he observes from Mr. *Locke*, spoke the same *language*, though they used the same *words*. But if by philosophical talk men might, with the assistance of *common sense*, get information in religion, and the duties of the *natural law*, why may not christians, by their holy writings, get *certain*, and indeed *full* information in religion, and the duties of the *natural law*, there so fully and plainly revealed? Must these writings only be *unintelligible*, or impossible to be understood?

“But, says he, the people without competent
“*skill* in dead languages must take their religion
“*upon trust*, from those who are subject to be de-
“ceived, and ready to deceive;” or, as he else-
where has it, “are bound in all places to pin
“their faith on the *priests*, and believe in men
“who have an *interest* to deceive them.” That

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there

there has been too much *priestcraft* in the world I can easily admit; and he has my consent to expose it as justly as it deserves. But I think he should not be so *unimpaired* in his censures: That *priests* in general have an interest in maintaining the established religion, and their own authority, right or wrong, is true; but to make them all *deceivers and cheats*, on this account, is unconscionable. Some, in case they are wrong, may be only *deceived*, and believe, without due examination, what *publick wisdom* has established, their *tutors* have infused into them a veneration for, and it is their *own interest* to maintain. All men are not *ill* men, nor should be passed on the world under *this* character, who happen to act and think wrong; though none can deserve a *good one*, who are known to act *one* way, and think *another*, or under *sacred* pretences are notoriously carrying on *selfish* and *secular* designs.

NOR does it appear *needful* to me, that those not skill'd in the original language, *must* pin their faith on the *priests*. Many of *these* no better understand it than *themselves*. But if there be a translation, in which both *priests*, and those who are *not* *priests*, are agreed, as what *truly* expresses the sense of the original, in all the *plain*, *important*, and *necessary* branches of the revelation, I can't see that they are under *any necessity* to believe as their *priests* do, any farther, than by consulting the revelation, their *own* judgment may concur with the *priests*; this indeed, in one sense, is believing *as* their *priests* do, but no farther than as they believe as any other man does, who happens to jump in judgment with *them*.

THAT there is in fact too much *implicit* belief in the *priests*, *must* be owned; but this arises not from any thing *peculiar* to christian revelation, it is owing to the common *indolence* of mankind,

their

their *aversion* to consideration and rational enquiries; their *bias* towards the customs and usages of their country, and *early prepossessions* in favour of prevailing sentiments and practices, &c. The people of all countries, *before* the publication of the gospel, as well as *since*, have generally fallen in with the religion of their country, whether that of the *prince or priests*, without giving themselves the trouble of examining; and were all *priesthood* banished out of the world, unless all worship of God were banished too, the religion in *vogue* would have the *body* of the people for its professors. Christianity is not answerable for such an effect, but some *imperfection* in human nature; how *sufficient* soever, *be* conceits, human reason is, to correct all mistakes in religion: Christianity gives no countenance to such conduct; it requires men to use their *own* faculties, and think and judge for *themselves*, as *this author* can prove, when it will serve his turn.

UPON the whole, an *external* revelation may have been, and may be of vast advantage to mankind in their *past* and *present* circumstances, to *enlarge* their minds, *enlighten* their understandings, *rectify* their mistakes, and *correct* and *regulate* their conduct. A revelation so circumstanced as the *christian*, that was to be opened in *one* part of the world, and thence communicated to *the rest*, and had dependance on *facts* there to be done, was fitly put into *writing* for such communication; and the language was as fitly to be adapted to *the place* where the scene was first laid. This language was *then* understood, and may in general have been understood in all ages *since*; and if so, may be translated *rightly* into *other* languages. To make the common change in words and their signification, a *reason* against this, is, in effect,

to banish all books, and ancient learning out of the world, even the writings of the philosophers, especially the *greek* ones, the chief of all. And if it may, people may understand it when it is in their own language. If there be some *strong figures* in it, not so easy to be understood, yet if what chiefly concerns them is *plainly*, and often express'd, what is less intelligible they may overlook. If it be a matter of difficulty, and requires no little skill and pains to translate it *well*, and the most *skilful* and *faithful* translators may in some places mistake the meaning; or if it be render'd *word for word*, the meaning of some passages is not easily to be found out; yet, if in all places of importance they have *reasonable assurance* they are agreed in their translation, and have given the *right* meaning (and such they may have upon easy enquiry) may they not consult these writings in their own language, and use their own understanding in searching and settling their meaning, and make use of all *proper helps* to assist their understanding in these enquiries, without rejecting that of their *priests*, and yet not *pin* their *faith* on them? Even as they would advise with any *wise* and *honest* man about any other affairs of theirs, to get what light they can concerning them, without renouncing their *own reason*, or acting against their *own sense*, out of mere *implicit* and *blind* regard to that of others.

I SEE none of those *frightful* consequences this gentleman draws; they are dreams rather than arguments; at least, if any *ill* consequences ensue, it is not christian revelation, but human *vices*, *weaknesses*, and *imperfections*, are answerable for them; and men are as liable to them *without*, as *with* revelation, unless all *publick* religion be banished out of the world. Men may be mistaken, and *differences*, and *disputes* may arise amongst them, notwithstanding the boasted *sufficiency* of the light of nature;

nature; and the bulk of mankind have been in ages past, and are likely to be imposed on in matters of religion and popular tenets, and terms, and usages, are likely to have their approbation, whether there be cheating priests in the world or no. It is prejudice, and nothing else, that can lay this at the door of christian revelation.

Sub § II. *His objections to the proof of christian revelation considered.*

WHAT he says against the evidences, by which christian revelation is proved divine, may be reduced to three heads.

First, **W**HAT he objects against the attestation to it by miracles.

Secondly, **W**HAT he objects to the credit of the first ministers or preachers of it.

Thirdly, **W**HAT he says of the uncertainty of its conveyance pure and uncorrupt to future, and down to our times. Each of these shall be distinctly and fully considered.

Sub § I. *Of Miracles.*

AGainst the proof of christianity by miracles he has two things chiefly to offer;

1st, **T**HAT they are only external marks of true religion, whereas true religion should carry in it evident internal marks, by which it is to be distinguished from the false. "Natural religion, says he, which is of the greatest importance to mankind, and is a perpetual standing rule for men of the meanest as well as highest capacity, carries its own evidence with it; the internal, inseparable marks of truth, which cannot be said of any traditional religion; this must want foreign aid and assistance."

"stances." Against "Natural religion, though
 "not knowable by intuition, is yet to be demon-
 "strated by such proofs as have a necessary con-
 "nexion with our self-evident notions. That God
 "has revealed his will any other way, can only
 "come under the head of probability." Again, "in
 "Nothing can be a greater libel on true religion
 "than to suppose it does not contain such internal
 "marks as to distinguish it, even to the meanest
 "capacity, from the false, so that the man who can-
 "not read his mother tongue, may yet know what God
 "requires of him, without pinning his faith on the
 "priest." This author knows that there are
 many christians as great enemies to implicit faith as
 he can be, and as little like the pinning mens faith
 whether on the priest or priest-bater. And sure
 whoever has examined the reasonings of his book,
 how loudly soever he clamours against the priests,
 will find that their wisest enemies would fain
 have their principles and arguments pass on their bare
 word. He begs the question an hundred times
 over: asks whether what he advances be not true,
 and not staying for an answer takes it for grant-
 ed, and then draws his conclusion in triumph: when
 yet his arguments are really very often weak and
 inconclusive: and such are these he here offers for

First, Suppose the law of nature in all its
 branches is strictly demonstrable by such proofs
 as have a necessary connexion with self-evident prin-
 ciples (though I cannot come into his way of de-
 monstrating it) and that it carries inseparable marks
 of truth in this demonstrative proof, is nothing to
 be believed in religion but what is capable of
 such demonstration? Must no man believe any one
 principle of the natural law, nor admit or practise any
 one duty of it, till he sees its necessary connexion with
 self-evident principles? It is, it seems, a standing rule

for men of the meanest, as well as the best capacities. And if he is to be believed, it is a sign of true religion, to suppose it does not contain such internal marks as to distinguish it even to the meanest capacity from the false; and these internal marks, if he is consistent with himself, are the demonstrative evidence attending it, so that, if he may be credited, the meanest capacity, the man who knows not his mother tongue, may know, and know demonstratively, what God requires of him: And nothing is true religion which the meanest capacity may not know, and know demonstratively, by its internal marks. Does this man ever consider what he asserts or maintains? Seldom indeed; his conclusion is still in view, and so he may secure this, he is content his premises should shift for themselves; for nothing can be more contradictory to the experience of the whole world, than to maintain, that the meanest capacities have such demonstrative evidence for the laws of nature, when to the bulk of mankind many of them are quite unknown; and those who have better knowledge of them, understand little of their demonstrative proof by which their necessary connexion with self-evident notions is made out. I fear, that if natural duty must be thus known by its internal marks, before it be owned and practised, its obligations will reach but a little way, whether men be left to trace it out by their own reasoning, or borrow assistance from his demonstrations. The law of nature is, indeed, founded in the reason of things, and, by those who have thorough understanding of these, may, perhaps, be demonstrable. But are the reasons of things so obvious, even to the meanest capacities, to those who know not their mother tongue, that they should be capable of demonstrating them? A task for which himself seems very incompetent, if we may judge by what he would ob-

truth, on us for demonstration, that religion and
 naturalism are the same thing. Many important
 branches of the law of nature, in my account, stand
 for nothing with him, that are at all demonstrable,
 and perhaps, with the bulk of mankind, his pa-
 radoxes are as indemonstrable, as these branches of the
 natural law are with him, who yet is such a master of
 reason. And on this foot, how little natural reli-
 gion, nor, in his language, true religion, will
 quickly be left in the world, any eye may see.

Secondly, It is, I think, *gratis dictum*, that God
 can require nothing of his creatures but what is so
 evidently founded on the reason and nature of things,
 that natural light can demonstrate it to be a duty,
 for this reason required of God; nor make known
 his will to them any other way, than by the light of
 nature. If he has given his creatures a law, found-
 ed in the reason of things, and their mutual rela-
 tions, such as reason may discover, or plainly dis-
 cern to be reasonable and fit upon discovery, must
 the supreme lawgiver be ty'd down to these rules,
 and act without authority by prescribing to them in
 any other instance? May he require obedience to
 nothing but what the creature can see an antecedent
 and necessary reason for? Were not this an unrea-
 sonable and unnatural limitation of the divine pow-
 er? It will be more fully seen^d hereafter that it is.
 But if he may command in such instances, has he
 no way to make known his will to his crea-
 tures but by internal communications, and that
 by plain and necessary deductions from self-evident
 notions? This, upon the supposition, is impossi-
 ble. Cannot God externally then reveal his mind,
 and that in such a way, as shall leave the matter
 out of all reasonable doubt? One would think this
 should be in the divine power, and that that man
 must have very unbecoming thoughts of the divine
 power,

power, that shall call this in question. And to what purpose is it for him to make known his will in such case, if the creature can't have satisfaction that it is his will, or that he has made any notification of it? *Thirdly*, Answer that a traditional religion, as he says, cannot by certain internal marks be manifested to be divine, that this must have dependance on some external evidence; and that this must fall under the head of probability; why should not the highest probability be sufficient and satisfactory evidence in the case? Why should not this prevail with men to receive and embrace it? If such evidence be deemed sufficient to determine men in their pursuits, in the most momentous affairs of life, why should it not be sufficient to determine them in a matter of religion, though that be more momentous? Or, must all the springs of human actions and affairs be powerless, till men have evidence more than probable, even certain and demonstrative, that they are acting right? What a wreck would this make in all human affairs at once? Is it not highly reasonable to believe there is such a place as Constantinople? And may it not be of great importance for a man to go thither? But whatever interest a man may have there, must he suspend all belief that he has any concern there; or, that there is such a place, till he shall be made out to him by evidence demonstrative? Would the rest of the world look on him, in such a case, as acting a wise and reasonable part, or that of one beside himself? Put the case then, that christian revelation can be proved to come from God by such evidence only as makes it highly probable; though the proof for it be not demonstrative; does that man act a wiser part who will not believe it, nor put in for any share in its privileges, because he has not demonstration for its being divine? Such

evidence, we say, we have for Christianity; and whether we say *truth*, will presently be seen, as it carries in it the highest tokens of *probability*.

Fourthly, We assert, that there must be *internal marks* on every revelation truly divine, which must evidence to the impartial reason of every man that it is worthy of God, and fit to come from him; at least, that it has nothing in it unworthy of God, nothing inconsistent with any of the perfections of his nature, or contradictory to any known and certain truth: Such a religion may yet want evidence that it is from God. Can God, in such a case, give no satisfying evidence? One would think manifold and undoubted miracles, attesting to the authority of those who publish it, should be good evidence in the case, and give full satisfaction to every man, that it is divine. But I shall have occasion to open this more fully under the next head.

2dly, He pretends that miracles are no certain attestations to revelation, nor carry the evidence farther than its *internal marks*; and that we ought to have certain marks by which to distinguish fancies from divine inspirations. "Numbers, says 'he', have taken their reveries for divine inspirations; ought we not therefore to have certain marks to distinguish one from the other?" Certainly reveries, the *wildnesses* of distracted imagination, will easily and naturally distinguish themselves from divine inspiration. If the persons themselves, under their distraction, cannot distinguish, the rest of the world quickly will; yet supposing men in their sound senses, I see not, why, with a supernatural suggestion, evidence may not be conveyed to the mind that it is divine. For why may not God, by light supernatural, ascertain the mind of the truths he thus imparts, and their being from him, as well as, by natural light, give men a certainty of the truth

truth of *self-evident* or *demonstrative* propositions, and that these are natural revelations from him. If some men mistake *illusions* of their own minds, for such supernatural suggestions, this is no more inconsistent with the *certainty* of such suggestions as are indeed divine, both in *themselves*, and to the *mind* to which they are made; than some men's mistakes of their own *fancies* for self-evident truths, in the natural way, is with the *certainty* of such self-evident truths, and those that have certain connexion with them. Nor can it easily be doubted, but the *apostles*, when first endued with the *spirit of wisdom*, and favoured with a comprehensive view of all christian truths, must have undoubted evidence that this was from God. So much light, such an enlargement of their powers and views, such a variety of knowledge poured in at once upon their minds, with the removal of all their inveterate prejudices, must have carried the *highest evidence* that it was from God.

True it is, this internal certainty to *themselves*, is no evidence to *others*, who see not these things in the same light; and somewhat beyond their *bare assertion* may be necessary to make out the truth of their inspiration to *them*. And such evidence, it is reasonable to think, God will afford, when he gives out a *new revelation*; and such evidence christian revelation was attended with, God bearing *testimony* to his ministers by *signs and wonders*, and *gifts of the Holy Ghost*. But such miracles are, with our author, no such evidence, it seems.

"God, says he, in the *Old Testament*, is said to suffer miracles to be done by *false prophets*, to prove the people; and in the *New Testament* such miracles, as would, if possible, deceive the very elect. I though therefore men could not mistake, as we daily see they do, a *natural*

Of the Evidence of Miracles.

It is natural for a supernatural suggestion, yet whether that be from a good or evil being, can only be judged by the nature of the things suggested. It is in vain to have recourse to miracles, if evil as well as good beings have the power of doing them. Again, "If evil beings can impress notions in mens minds, as strongly as good ones, and cause miracles to be done in confirmation of them, is there any way to know to which of these two, these notions are owing, but from their nature and tendency, or those internal marks of wisdom and goodness, by which they shew themselves to be parts of natural religion? And can the external proofs, then, carry us farther than the internal proofs do?" Again, "With our judging of a religion by internal marks, there is nothing but miracles to plead. And miracles, whether true or false, if believed (and where are they not?) will have the same effect. Nay, if miracles can be performed by evil as well as good beings, the worst religion may have the most miracles, as needing them most. It was a proverbial saying among the philosophers of Greece, Miracles for Fools, but reasons for wise men. And if you look no farther than the christian world, ignorance, and the belief of daily miracles, go hand in hand, and nothing is too absurd for the peoples belief." I have brought together all he has to say on this subject, one clause excepted, which will after fall in our way, to shew it in its full strength.

A MIRACLE is an unusual operation, and out of the common course of things, and exceeding all the known powers of nature, done at the will of men, to procure authority to them or what they say. If these are done by God, or by his commission, the authority attested to by them is divine. They prove,

that the persons who do them, or to which will they are done, bear God's testimony, and what they deliver, in his name, is to be received as from him. If it be said, that they report, or truths communicated to them by inspiration, if those unusual operations are performed by God himself, or other beings, who have authority from him for that purpose, they are, *in consequence* to the authority of the persons, and the truth of what they report and deliver, all in the name of God. If therefore it can be made appear, that miracles confirming a revelation are wrought either by God himself, or by visible beings acting by his commission, why should they not be admitted as divine attestations, and therefore as proper proofs that such revelation is from God? That this is the case as to the *christian revelation*, I should think the following considerations will make very reasonable, and fit to be believed.

First, It is no reason to dispute with *this author*, that there are *invisible beings*, both good and bad; that the *bad* ones may have power to suggest notions to the minds of men, and to enable them to work miracles, or unusual operations out of the common course of things, and passing all the known powers of nature or human art. What different ranks of invisible beings there are, and how far their powers may reach, we have no natural way to know; nor have any supernatural discoveries been made to us. That such beings, both good and bad, with divine permission or allowance, may suggest things to mens minds, is nothing absurd or incredible. And that they may perform *miracles*, as well as make such suggestions, is no way unreasonable to believe. Thus far *this author* and I have no dispute.

Secondly, It seems also highly reasonable, that before a revelation be admitted as divine, how

ever miraculously confirmed, the nature and reason of it should be taken into consideration. If it be proper *internal* marks their *external* proofs will not make out as divine original. A revelation that carries in it *contradictions*, plain and manifest *contradictions* to itself, or any known certain truths, cannot be proved *divine*, no not by *miracles*: for truth can never contradict truth, nor the God of truth *utter* what is contradictory to it, or authorize men to publish such contradiction in his name. The same is to be said of a revelation *allowing* vice, or the manifest customary violation of the laws of nature: If it teaches *idolatry*, *polytheism*, *profane* *swearing*, *falsehood*, *cruelty*, *lewdness*, *debauchery*, &c. or gives countenance and encouragement to such practices, no *miracles*, however great, could prove it *divine*: this were to overturn *morality*, and quite change or cross the *nature* of things. No, nor can any revelation by *miracles* be proved *divine*, that would put it in the power of any *set* of men, to give out their own dictates for *divine* *oracles*, and impose what *they* please on the world as the *mind* of God. As, suppose it were wholly to be committed to some *special* *bands*, whilst the rest of the world must have no *allowance* to examine it, but take it upon trust, as these *trustees* shall vouchsafe to give it out. Revelation supposes us *reasonable* *creatures*; and if it be from God, can never require such resignation of our reason to any *men*, or *body* of men; or that we should believe and practise in *flat* *contradiction* to it. Yet this would, without doubt, be often the case, were a revelation thus entrusted in *special* *bands*, which *none* *else* must consult and examine: It is but too much the case of the *Romish* *church*, and would be more so, had their *clergy* the books of revelation solely in their own hands.

Thirdly, A REVELATION pretending to come from God, must be such therefore, as by its nature,

Of the Evidence of Miracles.

and tendency, and marks, which will be
 seen to every eye, that it is from God, at least to some extent, as it manifestly is
 of him. And such evidence is the Christian reve-
 lation in all its branches. And considering the
 state of the world, antecedently to its full edu-
 cation, it is, what appears in such circumstances, very
 fit to come from God. When the world was over-
 run with ignorance of the true God, and belief of
 false ones, with gross superstitions and foolish idolatry,
 with the most flagrant and enormous vices and
 evil practices; when the laws of nature were little
 known, and less regarded, and no principles or mo-
 tives were left, of sufficient virtue and power to
 reclaim men; which has been shewn to have
 been the case of the *heathen world*, at the time of
 Christ's appearance, and is too much so at this day;
 could any reasonable man think a revelation from
 God useless? And what kind of revelation would
 such a one think fit or worthy in these circumstances
 to come from God? If such be now vouchsafed,
 as gives a plain and natural account of the nature
 and perfections of God, and the right way of wor-
 shipping him in spirit and truth, sets in view the
 whole scheme of natural duty, recommends every-
 thing reasonable, good, and virtuous, condemns
 every thing unreasonable, evil, and vicious; teaches
 men to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to
 live soberly, righteously, and godly in the world; in-
 culcates genuine piety, purity of heart and life, the
 regulation of appetites and passions; and spreads
 courtesy, kindness, and benevolence as wide as the
 whole species, without excluding the undervalued,
 or even enemies; does not such a revelation approve
 it self as worthy of God, and fit to come from him?
 Has it not the genuine marks of wisdom, truth, and
 goodness, of eternal wisdom, &c. and therefore of
 divinity upon it? Can this ever gain say this? No.

says he, as far as it is *consonant* to the law of nature, this is plain, and farther proof is *superfluous*. Miracles can give no additional confirmation. These things show themselves to be parts of natural religion: And can *external* proofs carry us farther than their *internal* proofs do? Not according to him, nor as far. Natural duties being *demonstrable*, but the external proofs of a revelation are at best but *probable*. Let us, however, go one step farther, and observe.

Fourthly, THAT where a revelation has evident internal marks, that it is worthy of God, miracles may be very useful, if not highly necessary to bear down prejudices against such an excellent religion, and procure attention and regard to it. Many of these truths his applauded philosophers durst not speak out, if they knew them, by reason of these strong counter-prejudices. And had the first preachers of this religion barely opened and proclaimed it, especially among strangers, would they have procured more regard than philosophers? If their religion recommended it self to the sober judgment of mankind, how few would have had patience to hear them out? Would not mankind in general have turn'd a deaf ear to them, if not run them down as blasphemers of their Gods, and enemies to the religion of their country, which with most men is sacred and venerable, however ridiculous or criminal in it self? But when they saw them furnished with miraculous powers, this must, in some measure, weigh against their prejudices, and engage their attention to things deserving the highest regard, and apt to recommend themselves to the reason and consciences of men; but in their circumstances, very likely to be slighted or exploded, without such extraordinary interposure in their favour. Such operations would naturally strike the mind, and awaken its attention more than the things

things themselves than they revealed. And when these were approved by their reason, as fit to come from God, the miraculous operation would yet give a stronger, at least a more impressive sense of their divine original, than the natural evidence, how demonstrative soever, could. The bulk of mankind are more apt to be impressed with such evidence, than that of *close and abstracted reasoning*, how readily soever their minds assents to every branch of the religion of nature, when it perceives the evidence for it. *Miracles* have their use, therefore, supposing a revelation teaches nothing but what is part of the *human nature*. But,

Figuratively, "A REVELATION may make some discoveries of truth, accommodate to the state of man, support some facts, and contain some institutions superfluous to its general end; which, though they manifestly appear to be not unworthy of God, nor unfit to come from him; yet cannot, by reason and internal evidence, be so directly proved actually to come from him. In this case, miracles are a proper attestation to its divine authority. The state of mankind in general is a sinful, and therefore a *guilty* state; As such, as will be more fully shewn hereafter, they must be *obnoxious* to divine displeasure. And if God be concerned to vindicate his *own* honour and authority, e'er he will *pardon* guilty creatures, and receive them to favour, this is acting every way becoming himself. If, now, a revelation opens the method wherein this is done, and sets forth his *own* Son as a propitiation, through faith in his blood, and reports all the facts necessary to this end; and enjoins any rites to keep up the constant remembrance of his grace and good-will to men by *his Christ*; no one can *reasonably* say, that any thing of this kind is unworthy of God. But if it be not, reason can't give full assurance that these things

things are from God; that they are his revelations, reports by his authority, and intimations actually divine. May not miracles, plain and undoubted miracles, now be proper evidence in such case, and establish its divine authority? Reason can not but acknowledge, that the moral parts of the revelation are *divinely becoming* God: it cannot prove any other parts of it *undecaying* him. The whole must appear then such as may proceed from him; and many and undoubted miracles wrought, in proof of their authority who teach it, and give it out, in *whole* and in *part*, to be divine; put it out of all rational doubt, that it is so. If it be not demonstrative proof, is it not the height of probability?

BUT, says he, if that truth, or those intimations, that have a plain tendency to promote piety and virtue, may hereupon *probably* appear to be from God, it can't be more than probable, that miracles wrought in their behalf, are from God. Whether this be fact, the reader will be better able to judge, when the observations on this head are finished. But, for the present, admit it. If *evangelical* truth, what is properly such, has a manifest tendency to promote piety and virtue, we have then a probability that it is from God, by this internal mark. If this can be made out, then there is somewhat, by his *own* allowance, in it, beyond the religion of nature. And I trust this will be plainly made to appear, before we have done. But, then, of what use are miracles, since it can be no more than probable that such are wrought by God? Do they then give no farther attestation to its divine original? Sure, if it can be proved *probable*, that these are from God, there is another probability added to the former, by his own reckoning. And *too* probable reasons are certainly a greater confirmation

confirmation to truth, than a *single one*. Say that it is probable, that the revelation, from its *tendency* to promote *piety*, is probably from God: Say also, that it is *not* probable, that the miracles wrought in confirmation of it, are from God: yet in *the degree* they are probable, they must attest to, and be a farther proof that the revelation is *probably* from God. And how highly probable it is, that miracles in proof of such a revelation are from God, either *mediately* or *immediately*, will appear by considering,

Sixthly, **T**HAT neither evil Beings can be reasonably supposed to have taught such a religion to mankind, nor to have wrought miracles in its behalf; nor good Beings, without a divine commission. If both one and the other of these have power to impress nations on the minds of men, and work miracles; yet *bad ones* can't be reasonably supposed the *authors* of such a religion, or to have wrought miracles to confirm it. Can the enemies to God, to men, to virtue, and sound religion, be imagined to lend such assistance towards promoting the honour of God, and interests of religion; or the making men wise, and good, and happy? which the christian religion is so well fitted to do, in whole and in part. Is this at all credible? Is it not acting quite out of character, and in utter inconsistency with the reason and nature of things, of which this author talks so much?

Nor can good spirits be reasonably supposed to break in upon the laws of truth, and the sovereign rights of God; and in his awful name, to authorize cheats to go out and deceive mankind, tho' so much for *their good*. In both respects, they would trespass on the laws of nature and reason. These and truth are the same thing; and it would certainly shew great want of regard to God, to make use of his name and authority, without commission from

him,

him, and do such manifest evil, be whatever good might come from it. If they wrought these miracles in attestation to the revelation, it is utterly improbable, whatever they did do, that they should do in on their own heads, and upon such falsehoods in the name of God. Whatever they did in the affair, it is therefore highly probable, if not most certain, they did by authority and commission from God. So that if evil Beings cannot be reasonably thought to be the authors of such a revelation, and work miracles to establish its credit, nor good Beings, without commission and warrant from God, it is not in the highest degree probable, if not beyond all doubt, that God must be either immediately, or by the instrumentality of good Beings, having a warrant from him, be the author of christianity, and the miracles attesting to it. Nor is it at all likely, supposing any inferior Beings should be disposed to act such a part, that the God of truth and goodness should continue at such a proceeding, or allow them to go on, without check or control. Such variety of unusual operations, done by such multitudes, in so many parts of the world, carry such an appearance of God's concern in it, as must almost unavoidably lead men into mistake about this matter, if he had not concern in it, and the revelation was not of divine original. What could himself do more, where men must be instruments, than was done in attestation to the christian revelation? What operations can attest a revelation's being divine, if these were supposed to be done without his commission and concurrence? And one but such as we may certainly know to be performable by no power but his own. And what this author draws as an inference, from the power of evil Beings to work miracles, is that then the worst religion may have most of such miracles, as needing them most, is in his usual

usual way: He is commonly in haste to his conclusion. If the worst religion needs the most miracles to establish its credit, and if evil Beings are disposed to give it what credit they can, are these evil Beings under no restraint or control? Is the great God an unconcerned spectator of what his creatures are doing through the universe? Or is it reasonable to think, he will let evil Beings do the utmost mischief they can, and exert their utmost power for deceiving mankind, and confirm the worst religion, by the most numerous, open, and unconfessed miracles? Is this consonant to his author's account of divine goodness? Must it not, according to him, hinder what is inconsistent with their happiness, and do them so much hurt? Or will the worst religion in the world do mankind no harm, if it do not destroy patriotism? Indeed, divine goodness does not oblige God to hinder all the mischief ill men, or superior evil Beings may do: But it is hardly consistent with his goodness, truth, wisdom, or any perfections of his nature, to suffer evil Beings to deceive mankind, and do them so much hurt, by establishing the credit of the worst religion, by operations miraculous, and these performed in the name of God, and that in great numbers, and with so much appearance of the divine concurrence in them. But,

Seventhly. If any such miraculous attestation be given to such a revelation as the Christians pretend to require a power properly divine, and to be out of the reach of every other Being besides God, the Son, or Spirit; this will carry uncontrollable evidence that the revelation is divine. If all the miracles of our Saviour are not such, as I cannot say they are, are none such? Is not the raising the dead, and calling all the vital functions afresh into exercise, after a total cessation, and calling back the departed

ed soul to its former abode in the body, to animate and act in it again. I should think, If any inferior Being may have a perfect knowledge of the animal Oeconomy, and know what constitutes the life of the body, and may have power to set the springs of life going afresh, is it reasonable to think they have so much power over souls, as to command their return into bodies as pleasure? If the sick may be healed, or the lame made to walk, by inferior Beings, can the ~~deaf~~ ^{deaf} be made to hear, and have their lost limbs restored by them? To me the making a limb to a body, and endowing it with life seems no more difficult, than making a body and endowing ~~that~~ ^{it} and both equally the work of omnipotence.

BUT whether these operations be out of the power of inferior Beings or no, let it be considered, whether the pouring out the holy Spirit on the apostles, in its miraculous gifts and powers, be not an attestation properly divine? Is God's Spirit at the disposal of any inferior Being? Are not the effects of this effusion plainly to be ascribed to God? How are the apostles of Jesus, men of low Education, no one amongst them above the rank of a publican, men unlearned and ignorant, ~~and uneducated~~ ^{and uneducated} in an instant furnished with a power of speaking languages they had never learnt: (fifteen or sixteen are reckoned up) and with a vast and comprehensive knowledge of what they were to communicate from God to the world; skill to interpret ancient prophecies, answer cavillers against their religion, whether Jews or Heathens, and address themselves to all capacities with whom they had to do; with a boldness to plead their master's cause before princes and rulers; and rid at once of their prejudices and fears! Could minds so narrow from the circumstances of their education,

not have been so? ^{He needs not}

1 Act. ii 9, 10.

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men's lies to serve these purposes; nor can give
 countenance and attestation to them, in consistency
 with his own *eternal verity*. If these miracles
 were wrought, it is in proof of *Christian* revela-
 tion; they must establish as *divine authority*. The
 proof is proper, strong, and indeed *irrefragable*.
 To tell us, as this author does, that miracles
 "whether true or false, if believed, will have the
 same effects" that is, procure credit to what
 they attest, may be true; where by *hypocrisy* and
 without regard to the *content* of the revelation,
 they are by themselves supposed *sufficient* vouchers
 for it. But what then, if therefore *undisputed* true
 and undoubted, are no proper vouchers for a re-
 velation manifestly *worthy* to come from God,
 even though the *interest* of God in them plainly
 appears. He may as well tell us, that reason,
 whether good or bad, if believed, will have the
 same effects; and then infer, therefore good rea-
 sons are no proper proofs of truth. His prover-
 bial saying of the Greek philosophers, *Miracles for
 fools, but reasons for wise men*, is but a trifling
 piece of vanity. Real miracles, in such a situation,
 are *reasons* for wise men, and such as they should
 be guided by; if they would act like themselves,
 and not turn *fools*. Though they should not be
 influenced by every strange or *prejudicial* event,
 and carried by it into *every whim*, without rational
 enquiry.

But when he tells us, that *ignorance*, and the
 "belief of miracles go hand in hand, as is visible
 in the Christian world, and nothing is too
 "surd for the peoples belief." It is somewhat
coarse than impertinence. He knows, that in
 the places he refers to, *Christian* religion is grossly
 corrupted. It is the *interest* of their leaders to
 keep the people in ignorance; this is made the
method of *deduction*; and miracles is one mean a-

among many, so promote this ignorance. Is it
no wonder, in such a state, the most plain things
should be believed by the people, or rather swa-
lowed at a venture? What in this is the case of
attribution, and miracles wrought in proof of it,
by persons who had no interest to serve, but that
of mankind, in open day-light, in the view of
men, before the most prying and inquisitive eyes,
which themselves could have no worldly eyes on
any? They were therefore liable to examination,
the most strict examination. And the whole world,
in a manner, was their enemy, and shared them
to the death. They run the hazard of their lives,
by publishing their religion, and shewing their
miraculous powers in proof of it, whilst none run
any hazards by opposing them, or endeavouring
to expose their pretensions to miracles, if these
were but lying wonders. As these miracles on the
same foot with the daily sun, he talks of, that go
hand in hand with ignorance in the christian world?
Are the casts parallel? If not, to what purpose
is this talk? It shews, indeed, his ill-will to
christianity, but at the same time is it notorious
chuse of it.

**Subst. II. Of what the objects of the Credit of the
first Ministers of the Gospel.**

Secondly, He objects to the credit of the first
ministers of the christian revelation. Ought we
not, says he, to be certain, that the propa-
gators of it could not be imposed on themselves,
and would not impose on others; that is, that
they were infallible and impervious to or in other
words, not men of like passions and infirmities
with others? It is highly fit, indeed, that we
should have reasonable satisfaction in the first

propagation of our religion could not be imposed on *credulity*, neither in fact reported by them, nor revelation given out, and that they would not impose on *credulity* of *credulity* certain, that this was the safe, all ways for necessary, much less such *credulity* of their being, both *credulity* and *credulity*, and perfectly safe from all the infirmities and passions of human nature. Is no man fit to bear witness to a fact, nor his testimony deserving credit, till we are certain that it is impossible for him to be deceived or deceiver in any case? Must not all human business, all commerce, all trust, and the public administration of justice at once cease on this supposition? And is such a demand reasonable? Facts are not demonstrable. Eye-sight is not in all cases infallible. What then? Will a man of known probity and veracity call God to witness to the truth of a fact, of which he is not certain? Must he not be believed, unless we have certainty that he could not be deceived, nor would be guilty of such prophaneness? Especially, if many of like character concur in this testimony, are we still to think it insufficient, till we are thus certain? Is not this extravagance? And why then may not the first ministers of christianity be credited, on their report of facts to which they were eye-witnesses, or had full opportunity to enquire into the truth of those that were; when they appear honest men, and testify the truth of what they report in the name of God; without our being certain that they could in no case be deceived, nor would deceive? If this be sufficient in matters of the greatest importance among men, why should it not be sufficient here? If religion be a matter of greater importance, and in which we have the utmost reason to guard against deceit, yet is it unreasonable to demand proof and evidence more certain than the nature of things will admit, and beyond

beyond what is reasonably insisted on in any case of importance. Caution proceeding beyond this is unreasonable, and no part of proper Christian prudence; and it is to be questioned, whether if we pretended to this certainty in case of the first ministers of Christianity, the persons who now require such certainty, would not make this an argument to discredit them; and cry out that it is utterly incredible that *their report* should be true, when the reporters are pretended to be more than men, and wholly exempt from human frailties. Where there is an humour of finding fault, an handle will never be wanting. But if we have reasonable satisfaction that the first preachers and publishers of Christianity could not be imposed on themselves, and that they were men of such probity, veracity, and integrity, that they would not impose known falsehoods on the world, what can be desired farther? Why should not their testimony be received and acquiesced in, though they were not altogether infallible and impeccable? And that we have such reasonable satisfaction in the case, will be plain from considering,

First, That the Apostles could not be imposed on themselves, in what they reported and gave out in their name of God, neither as to facts, nor their master's discourses, nor the revelations they assure us they had from God.

As to the facts they report they were eye-witnesses. Indeed they were men, illiterate, of no liberal education, nor did examine things as philosophers; but of plain, obvious facts, done in open day-light, in places of resort, in public view, where multitudes were present, common sense made them proper judges. Whether there were such a man as Jesus of Nazareth, what he taught, what miracles he wrought, whether he were hated by the priests and rulers of the Jews, and was at last

apprehended, condemned, crucified, and laid in his sepulchre, were facts in which it was impossible for them to be mistaken. Nor could they indeed have imposed such facts on the *Jews*, which they must know were mere *forgeries*; they must have been hissed off the stage at once, nor could have made one *proselyte* to Christianity. And as to the *miracles* they report, *themselves* must know, and *those* on whom the healing powers of *Jesus* were exerted, whether such cures were indeed wrought; whether the *blind* were made to *see*, the *deaf* to *hear*, the *lame* to *walk*, &c. whether these were *real* cures, and such wondrous works as did exceed all the *known* powers of nature and art.

INDEED the *resurrection* of their master, to which they were ordained to be *witnesses*, was not a publick event in the sight of the world; but, all *circumstances* consider'd, it was impossible they should be deceived as to *this* fact. His crucifixion, death and burial, were publick, to which *thousands*, it is likely, were witnesses. He was laid in a *new* tomb, where none before was ever laid, and whence none *but* he could rise. The *Jews* knew he had foretold his resurrection in *three* days, and to guard from deceit, and prevent the stealing of the body, asked of *Pilate*, and obtained a guard of *soldiers* to watch the grave. This was needless precaution indeed; the disciples, on their master's apprehension, *dispers'd*; and on his death, no doubt, were yet more *dispirited*; nor do they appear to have *bare* of his revival, and were very unlikely, from their circumstances, to *project*, and less likely to *execute* a project for stealing away the body. But had they any such purpose, the *Jews*, no doubt, took effectual care to have a *sufficient* guard to defeat it, and sealed up the grave. That yet the grave was opened, and the body removed, the *soldiers* knew, and were hired by the *Jews*

Jews to report that the body was stolen by his disciples whilst they slept, a thing extremely unlikely, when nothing is more criminal, and more severely punished by *Martial law*, than for a Soldier to sleep on his watch. And if they were all so found asleep, as to hear nothing of the noise in breaking open the seals, removing the stone, or taking off the body, how should they know any thing how it was done? Or, with what *scandal* or *justice* report that the body was stolen by the disciples? If they were awake, why did they suffer it? But with what confidence could *Matthias*, in a few years after this event, publish, that the soldiers made report to the *Sanhedrim* of things as they happened, had this been mere invention? This had ruined *their credit* at once, and crushed *Christianity* in the bud.

Nor could the apostles have been imposed upon in the fact, as is evident from their circumstances. The women who went first to the sepulchre had no expectation of their Master's revival, for they carried *spices* to enwrap the dead body for its *preservation*; and when they unexpectedly found the grave opened, and the dead body gone, and came back and made report of it, it was looked upon by the apostles as *a dream*; so little hope had they of his resurrection, though *Peter* and *John* hasten to the grave to enquire into the truth of the report. When *Jesus* had appeared to the rest, and they report this to *Thomas*, he is so far from believing it, that he declares, that unless he may with his fingers handle the wounded places in his body, and by sight, and feeling of the scars, made by the nails and spear, might be assured it was the very crucified body of his Master, he would not believe. And when his Master condescends to give him satisfaction, had they not all the fullest evidence, that it

was indeed their Lord revived? Could another person in these circumstances have imposed himself on them for Jesus? But when to this it is added, that he often shewed himself to them; during *forty* days; and once to *five hundred* together; often eat and drank, and often conversed with them; and was at last seen by them to ascend bodily into heaven, could they be deceived in the fact of his revival? Could all this be *dream*, *vision*, and a mere *illusion* of fancy? And yet the matter is made more certain still.

As during his life he had promised his apostles, that after his departure they should receive the Spirit, so after he was risen he orders them not to go out of Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of his Father, which they had heard from him; and promises them, that they should receive power by the Holy Ghost's coming upon them; and they should be his witnesses in Jerusalem, and all Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. And in about ten days after his ascension they found the Holy Ghost coming upon them, and pouring light on their minds, and giving them power to speak variety of languages they had never learn'd, and a boldness of spirit, and freedom and readiness of speech to bear their testimony. Must not this put it out of all doubt with them, that their Master was alive, and had indeed appeared to them, whose promise, both before and after his resurrection, was thus made good? Was it possible for them to have been deceived in this matter? Could such powers be mere cheats of deluded fancy? Could they imagine themselves endued with these powers when they were not? And persuade foreigners that they spoke their languages when they did not? Were all the world, as well as they, turn'd such visionaries at once? Is it not manifest to the reason of any man

of every man, that they could not impose on themselves, and fancy they had such gifts, when they had not? And that it was impossible they should impose this belief on others, or even that they came by those gifts in a miraculous, when they had required their tongues in the *ordinance*; and must not all men know, if they had such a gift, and if they had, must come by it in a way extraordinary, because they were in general men of low education; most, if not all of them, of *Gallilee*, the most uncultivated part of *Judea*; and few, if any, amongst them, had been brought up to *Letters*.

AND as in this matter it was impossible they should have been deceived themselves, or indeed deceive others, so this very event confirms their testimony to the preceding facts. If these gifts were vouchsafed them, *Jesus* was raised from the dead, ascended into heaven, and vested with plenitude of power for such purpose: One has necessary connexion with the other. These gifts must have appeared both to themselves, and all who were witnesses to them, miraculous indeed, if not properly divine. They must have been real, or they could never have been pretended to; or had they, the pretension must have been so easily refuted, that they must have been immediately despised and hoisted at as mad-men, nor could possibly have gone on with their shew. And if they were real, they must have confirmed their report of *Jesus*'s resurrection; of his having come at first from God; of his being returned to him; and of his great power and authority: For hence it is they derive all their gifts and powers; to this, and this only, they always ascribe them. If in these gifts they could not be deceived themselves, nor impose on others, the same is to be said of all the antecedent facts on which they have dependance, and are in necessary connexion

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with them; so that we have all reasonable assurance, if not *real certainty*, that in the facts they report they could not be imposed on; and indeed in a great measure, that they could not impose on others.

And God himself was so immediately and deeply concerned in the matter, these gifts and powers being all ascribed to him, and professed to be received from him, that if all were imposture, it seems hardly consistent with his wisdom and goodness to permit such powers to be conferr'd on them; if any besides Father, Son, or Holy Spirit, could confer them. No revelation from God can receive confirmation in a stranger way than this. Such proofs as these are naturally fitted to procure belief. Mankind must, in a manner, be unavoidably deceived by them, if they could be imagined attestations to imposture.

As to the discourses of their master, inserted in the evangelists, should we suppose they were not from the mere strength of memory, able to recite them, yet no one can doubt, but that Holy Spirit that could furnish them with wisdom, knowledge, tongues, &c. could also refresh their memories, and enable them to give a perfect account of the discourses which they had heard, with much attention, and perhaps, frequently repeated; and give them infallible assurance that they recited them rightly. And their Master hadⁿ promised them to send the Spirit, *To teach them all things, and bring to remembrance whatsoever he had said to them.*

And as to their revelations, besides the evidence these might carry with them of their being divine, evidence attended with infallible conviction; their powers so manifestly divine, must give them infallible assurance, that the knowledge communicated to them must be alike divine; discoveries from

God himself, the fountain of all light and knowledge. So that there is evidence throughout, that they could not be imposed on themselves.

Secondly, We have all reasonable satisfaction that they would not impose on others. Not only that they could not be deceived, but that they were not deceivers and imposers.

They began their ministry and testimony on the spot, in the very country where the facts happened. Had they gone out into foreign lands, having no commerce with their own, and there told a tale of what had happened in their own country, or after travelling into a land far remote, had brought back a report of events, which none in their own land could contradict or confute, they might have been suspected. But when they open their commission in their own country, and lay facts as the foundation for it, which there happened, and which had they been forgeries, all must have known to be such from the greatest to the least, what room is there for so much as a suspicion of imposture? When they report of Jesus, for instance, that he was born at Bethlehem, brought up at Nazareth, was a prophet mighty in words and deeds, that he was hated by the Jews during his ministry, was at last by them taken, condemned, crucified, buried in a new tomb, had not this been notorious fact, could they have had the face, in the hearing of thousands, at Jerusalem itself, before the very Sanhedrim, to have given it out and uttered it? And though themselves only, and not their whole people, were witnesses to their Lord's resurrection, could they have had the assurance to charge the supreme council of the Jews with hiring the soldiers to give out a false report concerning his resurrection, and which they knew to be such, upon the very spot, had not this been manifest fact? And had it been otherwise, the rulers of the Jews could have

so easily refuted and silenced them? Has this conduct the least appearance of imposture, or a design to abuse the world with shams? And though they carried this report into countries remote, it was only by degrees, beginning at the countries bordering upon *Judea*, first in *Syria*, then in the *Lesser Asia*, afterward in *Greece*, *Illyricum*, and by degrees proceeding to *Rome*, *Spain*, &c. Has this an appearance of imposture?

THEIR narration is plain, simple and artless, having no appearance but of relating facts as they were, without colour or disguise. They not only report the wondrous works of their master, proper indeed, to recommend him to the regard, esteem, and admiration of mankind; but they conceal not the meanness of his birth, education, and circumstances in life; nor are they silent as to the reproaches thrown on him by his enemies, which are things no way apt to recommend to the world. They don't hide or disguise their own rank or faults: This and the other were fishers; one a publican. They own the dulness with which their Master often upbraids them; the rash and indiscreet zeal, and forwardness of *Peter*, on more occasions than one; the ambitious contests among them for pre-eminence and the chief posts; their general desertion of their Master on his apprehension; *Peter's* repeated denial of him with oaths and curses; their stoutness of belief as to his resurrection, and the lessen of Jewish prejudices amongst them, with regard to the temporal kingdom of the *Messias*, &c. Such narration carries in it an air of great simplicity; it has nothing romantic in it, nothing apt to surprize; it shews no affectation of fame, or making themselves renowned. As they were plain men, untutored in the rules of art, so their writings are plain, and have the appearance of honesty and sincerity. Indeed this may be possibly affected, but consider-

ing the men and *their* circumstances, it is very unlikely and unreasonable to suppose.

THE religion they were sent out to propagate every where enjoins and inculcates genuine piety, and the severest virtue, and in particular the most strict regard to truth, both in ordinary conversation and all matters of importance, and dooms *liars* to the heaviest punishments. Is it natural to think men in such circumstances as *the apostles*, should see themselves to spread such a religion, by a long series of the most *fulsome* lies, heaps of the most gross falsehoods invented by themselves? Must not their *consciences* upbraid and reproach them with their self-contradictory conduct, whenever they set their religion in the view of *others*? What hardened wretches, what monsters of wickedness must they have been, if they felt none of these *inward reproaches*?

YET, bating the *common infirmities* of men, is there any thing in their conduct but what is strictly pious and virtuous? Had their *enemies* any thing to reproach them with, but their religion? Is there any wickedness else objected to them? Were they not men of shining piety; of inflexible honesty? Could they not, did they not, on occasions, appeal for this to them who *knew them best*; nay, to their *enemies* and *opposers*? And were men of *this* character likely to confederate in such a design, and go out into all the earth, and abuse the whole world, by the most *notorious* shams and falsehoods that ever were invented? Does this conduct suit their character; especially when it is added, that to their lies they must join the most flagrant *abuse* and *profanation* of God's holy name, and pass their *own* lies on the world as *his* sacred truths and revelations? Men of such low life take it into their heads to conceit such a sham, and carry it amongst men in the name of God, and at once abuse their Maker

and mankind! And this with such a character for religion and virtue! Is it not downright incredible? Can any thing worth more together than your circumstances and character, and such a *contrivance of fraud*, desperately, and in plain defiance of him, fathered on God? And what *motive* should put them on such an undertaking? Men propose somewhat to themselves; have somewhat in view in all they undertake; and such wicked wretches, as the *apostles* must have been, supposing they had proposed such an imposture, must have laid their scheme of advantage in this life; they could have had no comfortable prospect in a future world. What then could they propose to themselves? Could they hope to recommend themselves to the esteem and favour, either of the *Jewish* or *Gentile* world, by propagating a religion amongst them that suited the taste of neither, nor fell in with any of their *fixed prejudices*; but would, they might assure themselves, provoke both their hatred and opposition? A religion that abrogated all the ceremonial services of the *Jewish*, for which that people had an *unwearable fondness*, and were originally divine; and for many of whose rites even the *converts* to Christianity amongst them retained an unaccountable veneration: A religion that laid God's favour in common to *Jew* and *Gentile*, which his people had so long appropriated to themselves, and which, on the first opening the matter, was shocking even to the *apostles*, and occasioned afterward no little disturbance in the christian church, among *Jewish* and *Gentile* converts: A religion that flew in the face of all the *heathen* establishments in the world, cried down their *superstition* and *idolatry*, subverted the whole frame of their religion, and banished all their gods at once out of the world; and not only *innovated* in religion, of which the *Romans* were exceedingly jealous,

jealous, but quite abolished the *old* to introduce one wholly new and opposite. It was not only opposite to these settled prejudices among *Jews* and *Heathens*, but bidding defiance to men's *sense*, and calling them to the practice of the *strictest* *virtue*, and that mortification of *appetites* and *passions* as was not likely to recommend it, but must provoke the displeasure of the *divines*, who were winning slaves to them, and could cover their hatred with a pretended zeal for the religion of *their* country. Could they have any prospect of getting into *esteem* and *favour* with men, by going on such an errand? Could they have any other rational prospect, but of exasperating the generality, and exposing themselves to all the effects of their resentment and rage?

Nor wealth, nor preferment, nor so much as ease, could they have in view: their Lord had given them warning, *That they should be hated of all men for his names sake.* And reasonable hopes of any thing but contempt, scorn, opposition, and ill usage, besides all their labours and travels, they could not have: And this they every where met with, both from their own countrymen and strangers. Is it likely that a gang of impostors should set out on such discouraging views as these? Or, if they deceived themselves with more promising hopes at first, would they encounter these unexpected difficulties, and persevere in the design, cheat, and go on to cheat, and abuse the world, in spite of all the hardships they met with, wherever they came? And this when they must know, and their consciences must tell them, they richly deserved them! What should carry them so much besides all the *lapses* of human nature, and make them go on through labours, travels, watchings, baxards and sufferings of all kinds, in spreading gross lies, whence no advantage could accrue to

them: nor could they have the most remote prospect of any. What suffer reproaches and persecution from without; and severe reproaches from within; and this in all places every day of their lives; and renounce their friends, country, and interests of all kinds; and hazard their lives into the bargain, for so wicked a purpose? Is this credible? Was there ever such a pack of impostors before? Could a regard to *some* carry them such a length as this? For what? For being the authors and spreaders of a new religion? Was ever such a greediness for fame in any mortals, before or since? And these ambitious creatures, a parcel of *obscure fishermen*, or persons of as low life and circumstances as they? Is this credible? Such imposture, propagated by such men, under all these disadvantages, and that with such resolution and perseverance, from a mere thirst of fame! Is this natural? Is it not the most unnatural and unlikely supposition in the world? Or, would a set of impostors do all this, *undergo* all this, for the sake of *virtue*, and the good of mankind? Some of the most *vicious wretches*, contrivers of falsehood, and contemners of God, act such a part, labour so hard, endure so much, suffer so deeply for the sake of religion and virtue, to honour God, and make men *wise and happy*? Can any thing be contradictory, if this is not? Is it likely, they that did thus were impostors? No, they plainly appear to have had a *thorough persuasion* of the truth of what they taught, without any misgivings or doubts; and to have been animated to the undertaking, and carried thro' it, by the most ardent love to God, and good-will to mankind. They could never have ventured so much, suffered so much, and faced danger and death with so much constancy and intrepidity, in the propagation

gation of *their* falsehood: and therefore, in defiance of conscience and divine vengeance: *Enthusiasts* may possibly carry men such lengths, but impostors never can. The testimony of a good conscience, the sense of divine approbation, a motive for the honour of God, and good of mankind, and the lively hope of a blessed immortality, may animate to such hard service, and carry through it, with divine succours and supports: But a known and wilful cheat and deceiver, a wretch under the constant reproach of his conscience, or with a conscience sear'd, has nothing to prompt or push him forward, or bear him through so vast an undertaking. The apostles must therefore have believed their message divine, and that they had a divine commission: So that we have all the reason in the world to believe, they neither were deceived themselves, nor had any design to deceive others.

Now is it at all likely, had they been impostors, that a considerable body of men, such men as the apostles, should embark in such a design at first, and carry it on with such firmness, and every one prove unrelenting: especially when they were divided, and one went this way, and another that, and could not mutually advise with, hearten, and encourage one another. 'Tis many to one, that some one amongst them would flinch at such difficulties and sufferings, and own the cheat, which must have blown up all the rest, and laid the imposture naked to the world. But nothing of this kind being pretended, how reasonably do we believe, they were not impostors, but honest men, and ministers of God, intrusted to make known his will to the world.

But to the credibility of the apostles testimony he has some things to object, and that of ancient prophets, *Abraham*, he tells us, was guilty of an

a *polygamous* marriage; and when his hand was in
 bride, did he not mention his commerce with *Phar-
 ion's* maid? Or is such commerce, with him, no
 breach of the law of nature, though incestuous
 wedlock be? And might not *Abraham* have as
 good reason for marrying his *half* sister, or rather
 the daughter of his *half* brother, viz. *Haran*, as
 his own brothers and sisters, cast on a desolate coast,
 and cut off from commerce with the rest of the
 world? But *Abraham* was not thus cut off. For,
 there were others with whom he might have mar-
 ried; but it is very likely, none out of his own
 family; but what were *gross idolaters*. If this with-
 held him from marrying out of his family, he
 must marry in it, or not at all. One would think
 therefore, this author should have him excused on
 this head. But he denied his wife, and exposed
 her chastity. How does it appear? He did, in-
 deed, persuade her to say she was his sister or
 kinswoman; not to deny her being his wife. This
 was but concealing part of the truth. Her cha-
 stity he exposed no farther, than by suffering her
 to be taken from him, which he could not resist;
 and, it is very probable, trusted God would pre-
 serve it, which he also did. But this was a ble-
 mish in his conduct. It proves him indeed not to
 have been *impeccable*, nor exempt from *human in-
 firmities*; but does not prove him to be an *im-
 pious* or *irreligious* man. And he certainly was a man
 of great piety and virtue. Must he have had no
 revelations from God? Or must his credit have
 been destroyed on his averring he had; because,
 once or twice in his life, he was guilty of *disfiguring*
 truth; and that in surprize, and under the im-
 pression of fear? *David* was guilty of many ill things, which
 none can pretend to excuse; and so was *Solomon*.
 But it must be considered, that they were under

an ecclesiastical establishment, or rather a monarchy; in which God, as their ruler, signified his will many times by prophets. There were *several* of prophets amongst them, who were *trained* up to receive inspirations, and taught how to know when *visions* of *divine* were imparted to them; and this many times, to direct him to the administration of the civil government. He was *rejoiced* of such as prophesied in such a *style*, needed not be so free from moral blemishes, as *those* who first settle a new religion in the world, in the name of God. So that though David were the false, base, cruel man, he elsewhere would represent him, and Solomon in his old age was led by his senses into idolatry; both might have revelations from God, and deserve credit; and the people at that time might have all reasonable assurance that these revelations were *divine*. How *could* it be otherwise? As to the *prophet*, who told a *lie* in the name of God, to fetch back the man of God, who came to Bethel, to prophesy against Jeroboam's altar, he was in all likelihood an ill man. Bethel was not a safe place, at that time, for any that did not comply with Jeroboam's idolatry. And he wilfully deceived the *other*, by a forged vision of an angel. And he who had received a counter-charge from the word of God, was greatly to blame for his credulity, and going back with him. But as this *deceiver* had, it is great probability, been trained in the *schools* of the prophets, he might have a revelation from God, upon a particular occasion, his moral character notwithstanding; and the people might have reasonable evidence that it was such. We at this distance, when circumstances are so much unknown, are no proper judges of such an event. But how can he be believed, who is known to *lie* in the name of God? His manly *testimony* must be considered, that they were brought

there be any rules of distinguishing, which the Jews in that age of prophecy might have; tho' we now know them not. But will this instance prove the testimony of such *not* deserving credit, who were never known to give out lies in the name of God; but appear men of veracity and integrity in their general conduct, and the most undaunted constancy and firmness, in maintaining the truth of what they gave out for divine revelations? Whereas this prophet proves himself a liar upon the spot, and with his own mouth?

But he has somewhat to object to the character of the apostles themselves, which if it be of weight, must more immediately affect the credit of christianity. "Our Saviour, says he", will say to some "who prophesied in his name, and cast out devils, and did many wonderful works; depart from me, you that work iniquity. Whence it is plain, that neither prophecies nor miracles are absolute securities for men to depend upon." Securities for what? For their acceptance with Christ, who prophesy and work miracles? For of this only the passage speaks. They are so far from being an absolute security, that they are none at all: Workers of iniquity will be disowned by him at last, though they have been workers of miracles. Who doubts this? Or who asserts, that miracles are an absolute security, they shall never be deceived who depend on them singly for the proof of a revelation? And why then is this text here set before us? But though some may have been inspired, and endow'd with miraculous powers, whom Christ will disown as workers of iniquity, may not the revelation be divine, and the miracles wrought by these very men be attestations to it; whilst, whatever they are in themselves, and known to the Lord to be, they appear to the world as men of good morals? Especially

Especially when the *same truths* are revealed, and the *same miracles* wrought to confirm them, by many that not only *appeared*, but gave the most *convincing* proofs, that they are men of *piety* and *probity*? Is it to be thought, that among the multitudes, on whom the apostles conferred the *miraculous gifts* of the *Holy Ghost*, there were none but of *good moral character*? And yet were these *miraculous powers* no attestation to their *moral* who imparted them?

AND suppose *Judas*, who "afterwards proved so vile a traitor, as for a paltry sum to sell his Lord," when he went out with his companion, prophesied and wrought miracles, might not his teaching be *divine*, and proved such by the *miraculous attestation*, whatever his *unknown* character were? Did he not deserve equal credit with the other; whilst he taught the *same things*, produced the *same vouchers* for them, and was, in all appearance, the *same good man*? Or could it at all affect the credit of the revelation, that he afterwards proved a *traitor*? Indeed, did a *new religion*, pretended to come from God, rest upon *one single* evidence of this kind, the objection would have some weight; but as it is, none at all. Even *Judas's* testimony, in conjunction with his *honest* companion, is deserving credit; much more the *concurring testimony* of all the other apostles, men of such conspicuous *piety*, and unquestionable *honesty* and *truth*.

BUT, says he, "The epistle of *Barnabas* says, that when *Jesus* chose his apostles, he took men *irreligious and unchristian, superlatively wicked*; and they became his apostles first on *temporal motives*: And the belief of his *temporal kingdom* was so deeply rooted in them, that *Jesus*, neither during his life, nor after his resurrection,

was able to remove it. Admit this is true in this epistle, is it therefore true? Many Gay, falsehoods are certainly laid in the same epistle, and it looks very unlikely, men of industry, and following their business, should be such profligates and abandoned wretches. Nor do the Pharisees, who blame them for eating with *unwashed hands*, throw this in their teeth. Or say this is suppressed in the story, and that this charge is true; did they continue such? Is it at all probable, that such a crew of profligates should take it into their heads, to be the inventors of christianity? That so excellent a religion should be the issue of such heads and hearts? Or if this be admitted, were men of this character likely to procure any credit to it, or prevail on men to believe it? Would not all mankind have suspected them and their design? Must not their character have been an invincible prejudice against them and their religion? Such wretches set up for reformers of the world! Is it not unaccountable that this should never have been made an exception against themselves and their religion, and made matter of reproach by their enemies? But is any thing like this any where else intimated? Is it not notorious, that if this were their original character, they must have been much mended, when they went out to publish the gospel? And is this to the credit or discredit of Christ and his religion? That such profligates should by it be transformed into such saints, and become most glorious examples of true piety and virtue to mankind!

AND though they might at first become disciples on temporal motives, and were not easily dispossessed of their prejudices concerning Christ's temporal kingdom, which this author terms a belief, which Jesus, neither during his life,

nor

nor after his resurrection, was able to remove: yet, certain it is, that upon the descent of the Holy Ghost, and full instruction thereupon, in the nature of their master's kingdom, they got rid of all their prejudices, rooted as they were, and whatever their first motives were, for becoming Christ's disciples, and whatever expectations they had of preferment under him, they renounced all these hopes, continued still his disciples, and went out into the world, in prospect of nothing but hardships, hazards, sufferings, and death, to set up his spiritual kingdom, and spread his holy religion. A consideration, surely, which, instead of weakening, must establish their credit with all the thinking world. That on worldly motives they should first become the disciples of Jesus; and yet, when they saw all worldly hopes vanish, they should, on better information, go on and spread the religion of their master, under such discouragements through the world! Could prejudices so inveterate be so thorowly removed, but on full conviction of the truth of their religion, and their fond bones be changed into so glorious a contempt of dangers and death in their master's cause, without thorough conviction on full evidence, that his was the cause of God?

BUT "did not all the apostles desert their master, and flee? And the chief of them forswear him, as often as he was questioned, if he were his disciple?" They did; what then? Therefore their after-reports deserve no credit: Is this a just inference? Even this circumstance adds to the validity of their future testimony: Had not the divine writers been honest reporters of facts, he had known nothing of this defection or denial, nor had been furnished with this objection. These indeed argued great cowardice, and not a little unbelief, and

and in *Peter's* case, who was so forward, and in his own contest, so willing to die with his master, were much aggravated. But when these very *dastardly* men, so quite dispirited on their Lord's apprehension, afterwards appear in the face of the world; and before *angry* rulers, and the *raging* multitude, maintain their master's cause, and glory in suffering for it; whence the change? What should carry them above their *natural* fears, which at the former juncture, appear to have been so strong and prevalent? Has it any appearance of a rally of spirit in a crew of cheats? After their Lord's ascension, and the coming of the *Holy Ghost* upon them, we find them endow'd with so much boldness, as to tell the *Jewish* rulers, they were not to be terrify'd with any menaces, nor would suffer their mouths to be stop't: *Whether it be right in the sight of God, to hearken to you rather than to God, judge ye; for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.* "No, not whatever comes of it; you may do your worst, we shall and must go on." Nor was this mere *boastful* talk: They did go on, and persevere in witnessing to their Lord's *resurrection*; and in spreading his religion, with the most firm defiance of men's utmost rage; of all dangers, and death it self. Will any thing prove men to be telling truth in good earnest, if this will not?

VIEW these men under their *consternation* and *astonishment*, on the seizure of their master: How dispirited at this surprizing event, and at once dispersed! Whilst *Peter*, who skulked behind to see the issue, under the same surprize, *denies* and *abjures* him, through the prevalence of his tears. Then turn your eyes, and behold the *same* men recover'd out of their surprize, and determin'd, at all hazards, to bear testimony to *Jesus*, whom they had forsaken in danger, and the *Jews* had put

to death as a malefactor; and to maintain that he was ascended to heaven, and exalted to be a prince and a Saviour, and seated at God's right-hand; and to spread his religion, in opposition to all the powers of the world; undaunted under the most frightful menaces, firm under the sharpest sufferings, and fearless of death. Does not this speak them fully recover'd out of their former surprize, thorowly to have repented of their fault: and indeed, carried by supernatural influence above their *natural fears*? Whence this change, but from thorow conviction, that *this cause* was the cause of God? from *divine* encouragements, succours, and supports? from *ardent devotion* to God, and *benevolence* to mankind; a persevering concern, spite of all their *ill usage*, to make them wise, virtuous, and happy? and from the *enlivening hopes* of an happy immortality, which they set before all men, to encourage them to the practice of piety and virtue? Can their giving way in an hour of temptation, whilst they were yet much in the dark about their master's design, weaken the *credibility* of their testimony with any? Let their *firmness*, when they had received their full instructions, and were furnished with their full powers, be laid against it, how vastly will it *outweigh*? Such men, so hearty, so resolved, so much in earnest, in spreading so *excellent a religion*, and recommending its principles and precepts, by so shining an example, even *constrain* belief. What but a religion indeed divine, and breathing a *divine spirit* into them, could carry them so *boldly*, so *bravely*, through all their difficulties and discouragements, so much beyond *themselves*, and beyond whatever appeared in the world besides?

AND yet their dastardly behaviour may admit of some *excuse*. Say, that it manifested a *baseness*

of spirit, a cowardly dejection of mind; yet let the surprize and temptation be consider'd. *Sudden flurries* of passion often throw the bravest men off their guard: Their spirits are disconcerted and shattered, and their *resolution* over-power'd, before they can rally. In such a case, men may be guilty of a *criminal baseness*, who would rather die than utter a *known deliberate* falsehood, and much more be guilty of imposing a *sham* on the world in the name of God.

BUT "Paul and Barnabas, for an indifferent matter, had so sharp a contention, that it caused a separation." What is the consequence? Therefore they are not credible reporters of *fact*; nor is it to be believed they had any *revelation* from God. Necessary and certain inferences therefrom self-evident principles, are they not? But how does he know that this difference was about a *matter indifferent*? But allow it was, and that here was a piece of *unreasonable stiffness* on both sides, is this an *impeachment* of their veracity? Did *this gentleman* never strike an hear with a friend, about a matter of no great importance, which for a season might occasion a distance? If not, he and all his friends are happily temper'd: If yes, should this be objected to the *validity* of his testimony in a court of judicature? Or would any court of judicature allow of such an *exception*? Why then should it be any to *the apostles* testimony? Are they not to be believed, because once in their lives, two of them happened to have a *contest*?

BUT, "Peter and Barnabas were guilty of *dissimulation*, in refusing to eat bread with the Gentiles, upon some *Jews* coming to *Antioch*; which before they had done." They did: And this was a weakness and fault in them, for which *Paul* openly blamed

blamed them: But to them it might have only the appearance of a piece of credence. But suppose the worst, that they were guilty of a *known fault*, must this render them *unworthy* of credit, in what they solemnly avow, to both friends and enemies, every day of their lives, and that in the name of God; and risque all that was valuable to them in the world, in maintaining it?

BUT * *Paul says of himself, The good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that do I.*" And supposing this was spoken of himself, what is the consequence? Only that appetite and passion sometimes got the better of his conscience and resolution: That he had not such perfection of virtue, as to do all the good, and avoid all the evil he should, and found in himself a *general inclination* to do. What is this more than every good man feels in himself? Did this author never feel appetite and passion struggling against his reason, and prove too hard for it? If he says no, he is either *mistaken* in himself, or a *man-fuck*. If he owns it, is this a *just exception* to the veracity of his solemn testimony upon oath? If not, why should it be to the testimony of the apostle, uttering revelations in the name of God?

BUT in truth, the apostle utters not this in his own person; but, as the context makes evident, in the person of a *carnal Jew*. He is describing the state of one under the law, and fond of ritual observances enjoined by it, and by this temper more enslaved to sin and fleshly inclination: It is such an one that says here, *That when he would do good, evil was present with him: And the good he would, that he did not; and the evil he would not, that he did.* His reason told him, duties of morality were to be done; but his fleshly inclination

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did more powerfully sway him. The apostle often personates others, and speaks their language, as if it were his own. This author could not be ignorant of this: And it is disingenuous to the last degree, to quote passages by *mere sounds*, to cast a shade on one of the most shining characters in the world. Nothing can be more contradictory to the known character of this great apostle, than what he would insinuate by *this citation*: His worst enemies never attempted to reproach him, with regard to his moral conduct. The account he gives of himself upon all fit occasions, is the reverse to what he would intimate. In his defence before Felix, he says, *Herein do I exercise my self to keep a conscience void of offence, both towards God and man.* To the Corinthians he says, *This is our rejoicing, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, we have had our conversation in the world.* To the Thessalonians he says, *We are witnesses, and God also, how holily, and justly, and unblameably we behaved our selves among you that believe.* How deserving of all credit and regard are the reports of such a person?

AND now I am fallen on the character of *this apostle*, it will not be improper to go a little more distinctly over it. He was the great apostle of the Gentiles; the chief instrument in spreading the gospel through the heathen world, westward from Judea, as far as Spain, and as some think, Britain. No one went farther in propagating the gospel, or laboured more than he; nor was better furnished with natural endowments, or supernatural powers. No one run greater hazards, or underwent sharper sufferings. These facts being supposed, under what character must he pass in the world? If the religion he spread be *not* divine, he

^f Acts xxiv. 16.

^s 2 Cor. i. 12.

^b 1 Thess. ii. 10.

he must have been a deluded visionary, or a rank and arrant impostor. But, have we not inconsistent evidence, that his character and conduct were utterly inconsistent with either?

First, He could not be a deluded visionary, or enthusiast. His education, learning, good reason, fine address on all occasions, are utterly inconsistent with this character. He was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, as renowned a Doctor of the Jewish law, as any in his time. He was not a stranger to Greek authors, as is plain from his citations. He reasons justly and nervously, upon all occasions: He knew human nature and the world, and could insinuate into an audience with great art. Let his speeches to the Jews at Antioch in Pisidia, to the judges and philosophers at Athens, to the elders of Ephesus at Miletus; his defence of himself before Felix and Agrippa; his short epistle to Philemon, recommending his fugitive slave Onesimus to his favour, be consulted, and then judge if he understood not human nature, could not talk pertinently to his subject, and touch the passions with much art and address. Finer pieces, according to their compass and design, are not to be found among Greeks or Romans.

He was brought up a Pharisee, which sect had a peculiar spite against Jesus. And in the heat of his youth, his zeal flamed against christians, and christianity. He was the most furious persecutor of the disciples of Jesus; he was exceeding mad, as himself expresses it, against them, dragging both men and women to prison; and when Stephen was stoned, the witnesses laid their garments at his feet.

And
 Acts xxii. 3. Acts xiii. Ch. xvii. Ch. xx
 Ch. xxiv.

AND how came his persecuting fury to be laid
 OFF a *herce enemy* to christianity, what made him
 a professor and preacher of it? As he was going
 with a warrant from the *high priest* at Jerusalem,
 to seize all at *Damascus*, who made profession of
 christianity, he was struck down on the way by a
 light from heaven, and a voice accompanying
 it, saying, *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?*
 And upon his asking, *Who art thou, Lord?* re-
 plying, *I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest;* and di-
 recting him to *Ananias*, a disciple at *Damascus*, for
 farther instruction what to do. On getting up
 he finds himself made blind; but receives his sight
 upon *Ananias's* laying his hands on him. To this
heavenly vision, as he tells King *Agrippa*, he was not
 disobedient. He sets himself immediately to preach
 Christ, is made an *apostle*, with a special commis-
 sion to convert the idolatrous *Gentiles*, is furnished
 with all the *apostolical powers*, with full instruction
 in all the doctrines, discoveries, and duties of
 christianity; with the power of *working miracles*,
 and *speaking languages* he had never learnt, and of
 conferring *this gift* on others. This account he
 gives of himself.

COULD Paul dream himself into a belief of all
 these things, when there was nothing of reality in
 them? Could so gross palpable *illusion* go along
 with so much penetration, sagacity, sound judgment,
 and skill? To make him a *visionary*, is to con-
 found the most inconsistent characters. He was
 not, could not be deceived himself: He must
 know whether he was or was not converted, in the
 way mentioned, from a *furious persecutor*, to a ze-
 alous preacher of Christ and his religion; and whe-
 ther he had miraculous powers and gifts, which he
 could confer on others also. In these things it is
 next to impossible he should be deceived. Nor,

Secondly, Is it at all credible that he was an impostor, uttering revelations as divine, which he knew were not, giving out reports of facts which he knew were false, and pretending to work miracles in the name of Jesus, that all the while were mere trick and artifice, to cheat the world, and abuse them in the awful name of God? Indeed, in the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost there seems to have been no room for playing the cheat: speaking languages unlearned readily and fluently, could never be a piece of *legerdemain*. Without this gift, how could the apostle have executed his commission? How should he have carried the gospel among the *Aethiops*, and preached it all round from *Jerusalem* to *Moricon*; and, as is not unlikely, in *Spain*, *Gaul*, and *Britain*; unless he could have spoken the *several* languages of so many nations, that they might understand him, and converse with him? He must have spoken *their* language, or they must have miraculously understood his. In this there could be no *illusion*; they who heard him must know, whether he spake *their* language or no: he could not make them believe he did, if he neither *did* or *could*. To have sent him on this errand, without *this* furniture, and when he must first acquire the language of each people in the *common* way, would have rendered his commission impracticable. How many *months* must he have spent in learning any one language? How many *years* in learning all? And, how slowly must his work have gone on in this way? And, how unlikely is it, that he had acquired these languages in the ordinary way *before*? It is plain he was brought up to business; or, in our common phrase, *was a merchant*: he was by occupation a *tent-maker*, and wrought at his trade to get his bread. Though he was brought up at the feet of *Gamaliel*, it is not likely he had

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to perfect himself in so many several languages. And had he thus acquired them, whilst he presented himself to them in a way supernatural, some who know him must have been acquainted with this. And should they should they cheat be concealed? And if it were discovered, it must have ruined his credit and fame. It is certain too, that he travelled about in almost all places where he came. This must have been supernatural, and how unreasonable was it to believe himself had received this power in a way supernatural too. How unlikely is it that he should be collusion? How easy to suppose he should be an impostor? He is a man of a very unlikely nature, if we attend to his moral character. What this was has been shown from himself already and much more might be produced to the same purpose. He appears to have been one of great integrity, generosity, and good nature. He prosecutes his business heartily, and denies himself in many instances, for their good to whom he preached. *I will not be burdensome,* says he to the Corinthians, *for I seek not your gold nor silver nor your wealth but your salvation. And I shall very gladly spend, and be spent for you, though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be beloved.* Read his epistle to Philemon, see with what affection, tenderness, generosity and good-magnity he recommends to him his fugitive slave to Onesimus; and judge, if one of his zeal in the pursuit of his design, and breathing so much good will to mankind, be likely to be a cheat and deceiver; and persevere herein for so many years of life; and labour with an unrelenting heart, and travel hither and thither, and thousands of miles, in spreading the *gospel*. Does this conduct match with his character? *has he not a more virtuous*

WHILST

Was it not he was a zealous Jew, and persecuted
 Christians with so much warmth and attention, did
 not this show him *thoroughly persuaded* of the truth
 of that religion in which he had been educated?
 And when afterward, with no less forwardness, and
 with greater *frankness*, though with less fury, he
 spread the *Christian doctrine*, and preached the abro-
 gation of the *Jewish law*, does not this as evidently
 prove, that he thoroughly believed the religion
 he propagated was *divine*? And that he did not
 go about, and in the name of God, endeavour to
 cheer the world with a *straw*? If himself is to be
 believed (and why should he not? which nothing
 in his conduct gives him the lie) he tells the *Jewish*
Synhedrim, *I have lived in all good conscience before*
God to this day. Before and after his conversion to
 Christianity he was the same *honest* man, pursuing
 his own light, and acting according to his judg-
 ment of things. And, what but conviction of its
 truth, could make him renounce his former *preju-
 dices*, and desert a religion in which he had been
 educated, and for which he had shewn himself so
 very zealous; and fall in with that he had persecu-
 ted, and spread it with as fervent and intense, but
 a more *benevolent* and *better-matured* zeal? Can any
 other account be given of the matter that is rational
 and consistent?

What *views* could he have in embracing the
 religion of *Jesus*, and undertaking the office of
apostle of the Gentiles? Did he herein aim at *wealth*
 and *preferment*? At the *favours* and *friendship* of the
 world? A religion which he knew his *Countrymen*
 hated and sought to suppress, and in which design
 himself had borne so great a part. And did he not
 expose himself to their hatred and rage, by his
 apostasy from theirs, and professing, and preach-
 ing

ing. 189. A man of his education and endowments, had he continued a Jew, and a zealot for their religion, stood fair for esteem and preferment among them; but on his becoming a professor and preacher of Christianity, he must be peculiarly obnoxious to their displeasure and enmity, on account of an *former zeal* for the religion in which he was brought up. Nor could he be without a foresight and expectation of it. Is it reasonable to think, that for propagating *imposture*, a man of Paul's sense, probity and generosity, should renounce all present prospects of *advantage*, and expose and hurt himself to so much *probable*, nay, *certain* danger?

WHEN he carried the Gospel among *idolatrous* *heathens*, and by it attempted, not to *correct* and *mend*, but *abolish* and take away the *whole frame* of their religion, could he expect any thing but *opposition* from the bulk of mankind, ever fond of the *established religion*; and the *rulers* of the world, ever jealous of *changes* and *innovations* in it? He could not but know how jealous the *Romans* were on this head, and under *their* power and rule almost all the known world then was. Could he expect any thing, but to be deemed and treated as one *who turned the world upside down*; a *blasphemer* of *their* *Gods*, and an enemy to their religion; and to provoke the resentment of the *rulers*, and rage of the *populace*? It must cool the courage of any *impostor*, who could not be sure of not being detected, when all this danger stood open to his *view*, and no prospect of advantage offered to *balance* it. Or, could he have been so weak, as to *set out* on his design, without any expectations of *this sort*, yet upon a few years trial, one would think, he should have been quite disheartened.

But

But to struggle on through such difficulties, for twenty or thirty years together, amidst an increasing ill usage, running continual hazards, and exposing all that was dear to life, and *yet* without out any counter prospect, is particularly *unreasonable*; much more, to do this with such neglect and contempt of self, as to be unmoved at the thought, nay, to triumph in the expectation, and say, *None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear, so I may finish my course with joy, and tell the Gospel of the grace of God.* Or, *I take pleasure in afflictions, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake.* Is this the language of imposture? Of a known cheat and deceiver of mankind?

NAY, Paul must have expectations of much opposition, and unkind usage from *blasphemous* converts from Judaism to Christianity, who would have blended both religions, and bound upon christians the observance of *Moses's law*, at least the rite of circumcision. From this bondage he every where preached, that *Gentiles*, converted from idolatry were free. This must provoke the displeasure of *these zealots*; so that he, in a peculiar manner, was unlikely to recommend himself to the esteem and favour, and good will of mankind. And, what should prompt him to act such a part, and propagate *artful imposture*, so much to the common dislike?

SEE what an account he gives of what he underwent, to a church, where he had *enemies*, who would have been glad of an opportunity of decrying him, by catching him in a *false story*. How painful were his *travels*. How constant and unwearied his *labours*. How manifold and great his *sufferings*. — From Jerusalem, and round about to Illy.

Acts xx. 24.

2 Cor. xii. 10.

Rom. vi. 10.

Illyricum, ^{Illyricum} be fully preached the Gospel of Christ.
 How many countries are included in this circuit?
 How many thousand miles did he walk on this
 errand? But hear him summing up the matters
 himself to the Corinthians: ^{Are they ministers of}
 Christ? ^{He} ^{appears as a} ^{fool} constrained in his own
 vindication to say these seemingly boastful things
 of himself. I more, in labours more abundant, in
 stripes above measure, in prisons frequent, in deaths
 oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes
 save one; thrice was I beaten with rods; once I
 was stoned; thrice I suffered shipwreck; a night and
 a day have I been in the deep. In journeyings often,
 in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by
 my own country-men, in perils by the heathen, in
 perils in the city, in the wilderness, in the sea, and
 amongst false brethren. In weariness and painful-
 ness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in
 fastings often, in cold and nakedness; besides what
 cometh on me daily for the care of all the Churches.
 And again, In all things approving our selves as the
 ministers of God, ⁱⁿ much patience, in afflictions,
 in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprison-
 ments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in
 fastings, &c. What had he, now, to counter-
 balance these labours, perils, and sufferings? Not
 ease, nor the favour and friendship of men; nor
 riches, he laboured with his own hands for neces-
 saries, that he might not make the Gospel charge-
 able; so nor, finally, without reward and preferment.
 Had he nothing of the common ingredients of man
 in his make; that he should abjure what all other
 men court; and chuse, and have pleasure in what
 all other men dread and shun? And this purely,
 because he had taken into his heart to spread a
 Gospel that could be as wide as wisdom, and as
 plain as the light of the sun. But what must be the consequence? But that
 the religion of Christ, and the religion of the
 apostles, should be the religion of the world.

The Apostle Paul no Impostor.

mankind by *sham wonders* and all this in the
 name of God? Is this at all credible? No, no, no!
 motive of human action could prompt him to it: he
 not duty to God; not good will to men; not *sham*
honour; nor interest. Nothing can be imagined to
 do it, but acquiring a name when he was dead,
 and gathering from *his labours* more honour to
 himself than he had. *Paul* such immoderate thirst for
 empty fame? A vain-glorious creature beyond ex-
 ample. What, abjure all the valued things of
 this world? Embrace poverty, hunger, thirst,
 nakedness, contempt, danger, sufferings, and
 part with life itself, for the sake of a little *popu-*
lar breath, that would never tickle his own ears. Is
 he so long painfully and patiently passing the
 gloomy scene, and then wrap his eyes in the
 shades of death, that he might be famed for the
 spreader of a religion which yet owned another au-
 thor, when he should be here no more? Is it like-
 ly the wife, the penetrating, the skillful *grierson*,
 St. Paul, was indeed so vain-glorious a creature,
 and so set on spreading a *sham* imposture for so
 very empty an end? Would such a dream of glory
 by any one of common sense, be laid in the bal-
 lance against all those evils and the reproach of
 conscience into the bargain? And this as an under-
 agent, only whilst another impostor was to have
 the chief honour of it? Is not this an account of
 things hugely unnatural, and in no manner of con-
 nexion with any knowledge we have of *Paul*?
 whatever it may have with *his author's* self-evident
 notions? *Paul* was a true Christian, and a true
 Upon the whole, is it not utterly unreasonable
 to suppose St. Paul either a visionary or impostor,
 deceived himself, or a deceiver of others? And if
 neither, what must be the consequence? But that
 the religion he so industriously and gloriously spread
 amongst

amongst men, was what he maintained, *Christianity is the truth of God*. Not should little difficulties stagger any, where such plain and convincing evidence of its *heavenly original* shines on us with so full and glorious a lustre.

Sub § III. *Of the reasons offered by him, to make the faithful conveyance of Christianity to our times questionable.*

Thirdly, He objects to Christianity, that we can have no certainty of its faithful conveyance down to us. "Supposing, says he, prophets and apostles, to have been infallible and impeccable (which, as has been shown, neither is supposed by Christians, nor needs to be) what certainty have we, that the things taught by them have been faithfully conveyed down, for many generations, by men neither infallible nor impeccable?" If we have not evidence properly demonstrative, which the nature of the thing admits not, we have all the evidence, as will by and by be seen, that can reasonably be required. What the apostles taught they have committed to writing: *these writings* we have: In them their sense remains, tho' we can't, where doubts may arise, as certainly know their meaning, as we might have done, by recourse to themselves whilst living. Suppose the transcribers were neither infallible nor impeccable; yet if we have good proof, that they were careful and exact copiers of the apostles writings, which will quickly be made appear, we have all the satisfaction that can be reasonably required in the case.

INDEED, had the revelation been conveyed only by word of mouth, from one generation to

another, we might have been in much doubt, whether what comes to us be *the same* the apostles taught. Men might mistake the sense of what themselves heard, and putting *their* sense into words of *their own*, might misreport it; nor could there be any certain means to correct these misreports. But whilst the apostles' writings may be consulted; if their language is intelligible, their sense is now to be known in all matters plain and necessary. If there be also some things in their revelations, about which *speculative men* may differ; some passages about which the *criticks* can't agree; this is what happens as to all ancient writings; and it is utterly unreasonable to make *this* an objection against the Gospel revelation: *Commentators* and *criticks* thus differ about the sense and reading of both Greek and *Latin* authors. If they do so as to some passages of christian revelation, yet since in matters necessary to be known, and the main design, the meaning may be easily found out and ascertain'd, this is all that can be reasonably desired. But,

"As there can be no demonstration, says he, of the revelation *it self*; neither can there be of its conveyance to posterity; much less that it is conveyed *entire* to distant times and places." This is admitted; *facts* are not capable of demonstration; even *eye sight* is not demonstrative, nor in all cases infallible. What then? Must we not therefore believe *our eyes*? Reports of others are not demonstrative evidence. Is nothing, therefore, to be believed on *the report* of others? What demonstration has he that the writings of *Aristotle* or *Tully*, are convey'd to us *entire*? What then must we lose the benefit of all the writings of his *magnified philosophers*? What mad work would it make

make in human affairs, if nothing was to be admitted as evidence, but on this point. Surely, if the conveyance of the revelation be not strictly demonstrable, yet if we have proof for it, that would pass, and ought to pass for good, in other cases of importance, it should satisfy us here.

But, "the very nature of probability," says he, "is such, that were it only left to time it self, even *that* would wear it out; at least, if it be true, what mathematicians pretend to demonstrate, *That facts depending on human testimony must gradually lessen in proportion to the distance of time from the event.*" I suppose he means here, in credibility; and by probability in the beginning of the sentence, probability as to *facts*. Himself speaks with *some* diffidence as to this mathematical talk. Nor do I see what purpose it can serve, without *adjusting* the proportion in which probability lessens, that we may know when it is quite worn out, and the fact becomes *improbable*. If it must be in *arithmetical* proportion decreasing by *unity*, then what is probable at a year's end, is *ten* times less probable at ten years end, and *seventeen hundred* times less, at so many years distance. Is *such* a decrease of probability enough to wear it out, so that the christian revelation being about such an age, is now become *improbable*? Does *this* author believe no facts of this standing? Say, those reported by *Cæsar* in his *Commentaries*, or even more ancient than these? Say, those reported by *Thucydides* in his *history*? If so, why should this be made a reason against the *credibility* of christian revelation? Sure, we have as good proof of the *authenticity* of our sacred books, and what is reported in them, as we can have of these histories and their reports. And

It is not saying that the Gospel is a *certainty*, to call it fact, a *revelation* against which would in any other case be a *very* explanation.

SAY, that the probability does not *stand* with regard to these facts, unless we had been *contemporary*, or had lived while they were *in* the memory of many: have we not a great probability as in any other case would induce and engage belief? As much as *never* as no *reasonable* room for doubt? And we would determine any *wise* man to *believe*, and venture *considerably* on it? If so, the belief is reasonable, though we have not demonstration for it.

And in truth, we have *greater* probability in the case, than in that of any other ancient history. The writers of the Gospel were some *eyewitnesses* of the facts they report, and the rest in great intimacy with those who were *such*. They committed their *names* to writing, at least the three first *evangelists* did, whilst the facts were recent, and had they been false, could have been contradicted and refuted by thousands still alive. Many of the facts are very *particular*, circumstances of time, place, persons, &c. are related. They were published on the *spot* where the *scene* was laid, not in places foreign or remote. The writers maintain the truth of what they report with the greatest *constancy* and *firmness*, in the face of the utmost danger. And though the histories were written by different *persons*, at different *times*, and in different *places*, and in no *contact* with one another, there is very good *agreement* in the facts reported by all. What other ancient history is thus circumstanced? Or carries in it such an air of truth or credibility? And is it not a piece of *impudence* to yield credit to other histories and historians, and refuse it *here*? Are other histories credi-

ble, notwithstanding their *equal*, or even *greater* age? And why not *these*, in very well circumstanced, this mathematical calculation notwithstanding?

Alas! is not the *quick*, the *amazing* spread of the religion of *Jesus*, to which heathen writers bear testimony, a confirmation of the *credibility* of what is reported in our *sacred writings*? It has been already observed, how necessary the *miraculous* gifts of the *Holy Ghost*, particularly that of *languages*, were to this end; and would not the event make it *likely*, that the preachers of the religion had some such gifts, had the *sacred writings* said *nothing* of the matter? Could this religion, so opposite to all else at that time in the world, have been diffused so wide, in so short a time, without such gifts and miraculous power? *Nero* first persecuted the christians; and, as *Tacitus* tells us, put a vast multitude to death; who ended his reign in about *four and twenty* years after our Saviour's crucifixion. In little more than *sixty* years from the same event, and before the death of all the apostles, *Pliny* tells *Trajan*, the *Roman Emperor*, that in his province, all ages, sexes and ranks, had embraced Christianity, not only in *cities* but *villages*; so that the *heathen* temples were in a manner unfrequented.

Could men of low education, who must first learn the language of the several People to whom they preached, in the *tedious*, *natural* way, have made such dispatch in their work? Or could they, without other *supernatural* powers, have made such way into mens hearts, and brought such multitudes into the profession of *their* religion? A religion so little suited to the taste of mankind, and against which they had such *deep* and *rooted* prejudices, was opposed by all the wit

and

and learning, all the power and authority in the world, as well as by the lusts of men, yet many inveterate enemies; yet it stands the shock of this united opposition from combined prejudice, malice, learning, and persecuting power, pushes on its conquests, makes numerous converts, and prevails against *beastly idolatry* and *superstition*. In what method, by what means, could it thus proceed and triumph? Had the apostles any *natural* talents or advantages for such success? Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles, though a man learned in the Jewish law, and a man of much good sense, was no *good speaker*, nor could set off the best composed speech, and flourish in haranguing an audience. Though he had a masterly way of discoursing, reasoned closely, and could touch the passions; yet did he not use *the excellency of speech, nor the enticing words of man's wisdom*; nor, if he had, would this have propagated Christianity, and made such way for it into the world, without *the demonstration of the spirit and power*. The other apostles had not his advantages. And how excellent soever Christianity be in *itself*, prejudices against it ran so very high, it declared such enmity to the *vices* of men, it offered such affront, and poured such indignity on *all the religion* prevailing in the *beastly* world, that had not divine powers attended its publication, it could hardly have obtained an *hearing*, it had been rejected at once, and the apostles had been run down on all hands. Men making *no figure*, back'd with no *human* power and authority, in no *credit* with the people, but in common account *brothers* and *vagabonds*, and having no temptations to offer men, could never have diffused the *Gospel*, brought men off from old customs, usages, and

^c 2 Cor. xi. 6.

^d 1 Cor. ii. 1, 4.

their *established religion*, cured them of their inveterate prejudices, and brought them over to a religion, so *contradictory* to all their rooted sentiments, if somewhat *extraordinary* had not been done to procure them credit and authority, and make them regarded. The success of their ministry is so *extraordinary* an event, as confirms much the credit of their story. Admit their having been made with *miraculous powers*, that they could, and did, for instance, confer on multitudes the *gift of tongues*, &c. as well as heal diseases and raise the dead, this would naturally draw men's attention to them and what they taught, and give a mighty force to it. But suppose them destitute of such powers, and what should stem the torrent for them, and bear down prejudices, *power*, learning, and mens vices too, that were all against them? Could *their story* it self procure them credit sufficient for this? Would it not have been the common ridicule and scorn, and laugh'd at as a *filly and impertinent tale*?

So that the truth of what is recorded in *scripture*, of these *miraculous powers*, though not attested to by *other historians*, is made exceeding probable, from the *great success* attending their ministry, and the triumphs of Christianity over the *idolatry* of the heathen world, so much recommended by the countenance it gave, in manifold instances, to mens vices and corrupt inclinations. This success *beats* *their own*.

And had they not, the change made in the face of the world by it, the extirpation of *heathen idolatry*, in a few ages, out of the world, would have proved that a *divine power* must go along with a religion that had nothing else to carry it through all the *opposition* it must meet with, and at last make it triumph over it. To question the

event is to destroy the credit of all history: and to believe it, and yet suppose Christianity to be *delusion*, or mere *juggle* and *imposture*, is somewhat, if possible, yet more *extravagant*. If time takes off from the *probability* of *fact*; yet the fact, that the christian religion was propagated in the manner recorded in the *Gospel*, is made *highly probable* by the wonderful success of it in the world: And yet nothing deserves belief if this event does not. We can trace it to its original: we do know, if we know any thing of *past time*, that at *such a period* the whole known world, *Judea* excepted, was quite over-run with *idolatry*; and at another period not very remote, it was quite rooted out of the *Roman empire*, and many other realms; and this by the christian religion published by some *Jews*, of no note and figure, who preached a *crucified Saviour*, and called on men to *turn from their idols to the living God*, made converts to their religion almost every where, in cities of trade and business, in the very heathen seats of learning, in the metropolis of provinces, in *Imperial Rome* it self, and even in villages; prevailed over *eloquence* and *oratory*, confounded *philosophy*, went on in spite of *persecuting force* and *power*, conquered the most *unrelenting prejudices* of mankind, and at length became the religion of the empire. The change is known: If the manner of the change be only to be learnt from the scripture, yet is the account there given made *highly probable*, by this amazing event: No other account was ever given of it. Let the enemies to Christianity produce it, and support it with proper vouchers, if they can; if not, let them own the *credibility* of christian revelation, not built upon *traditional tales* of *priests*, but supported by evidence not reasonably to be gainsaid. The distance of time from the event cannot discredit an

account thus circumstanced and thus supported. But what evidence have we that this religion is conveyed down to us?

"It is a rule," says he, "observed in the courts of England, that though the attested copy of a record be good proof; yet the copy of a copy, however attested, is not admitted as proof. This is a caution no one was ever heard to blame; and carries this observation with it. That any testimony, the farther off from the original truth, that is from the being of the thing itself, the less force and proof it has." But why is this practice in the English courts alledged here? Are all our usages founded in reason, and in necessary connexion with self-evident notions? Are not some of them contrived for the benefit of the courts and officers? I may self have seen an indictment qualified for a false concord in grammar, and the want of a dash to a curtailed word, and the prosecutor forced to begin again, though there was no pretence that the copy varied in sense from the record. Was there any reason for this, but that the lawyers could make their advantage of it?

AND why may not this be the reason of this other usage? In the nature of the thing, a copy attested by a proper officer, can only be a good proof, because he is such an officer, or else a person of unquestionable care, exactness and fidelity. If the former be the reason, the alledging this practice is hugely impertinent here, and carries nothing of his observation in it. If the latter, why is not a copy from the copy of equal validity, if as well attested? And in this case his observation falls to the ground. If the first be an exact copy from the original, an exact copy of this copy must

must be as exact a copy of the original, and if attested by one of equal estate, exactness and fidelity, deserves equal regard; though our law admits it not for proof. If the *first* transcriber be supposed to have mistaken the original record, I see no reason why his copy should be taken for proof, or pass for a true copy. But suppose him not mistaken; and the transcriber from him not mistaken neither, and his transcript must be an equally true copy. And why, in reason, it should not pass for such, I see not.

True it is, all men are liable to mistakes; the most exact and careful may, through haste or oversight, copy wrong; and an exact copy from this must copy *his*, and through haste and oversight may add more. And several copies from the record may have other and more mistakes, than are in any single one. The farther any writing is from the original, the less it is by itself to be depended on. Let this be allowed; what then? Where we cannot come at the original records, must we throw away all the copies? Yea; why? We know not but this writing, by passing through various hands, is become entirely variant from the original. What universal doubt must this introduce, of all ancient writings and history? Nothing, it seems, is to be depended upon; nay, must not this way of reasoning bring records themselves into doubt? Every remove in traditional truth, it seems, weakens the proof; and the more hands it has successively pass through, the less evidence it receives from them. Can we be sure that records themselves, of four or five hundred, or a thousand years standing, are true records? Will there be room left us, at this rate, to believe any facts in ages past, or any thing but what our eyes see?

But would it be an advantage to have every copy of ancient authors, whose original writings are lost, since all have not, nor can be supposed to fall into the same mistakes; but since to have written one place, and some in a different way. The comparing them together helps to settle the true readings, and the errors in number they have; the better assistance they have from them to this purpose. But they judge wrong, it seems, and have taken abundance of useless pains in this work, when matters are so full of uncertainty, and Aristotle is not to be found in Aristotle, nor *Livy* in *Livy*; so many transcribers having, for any thing we know, quite changed these authors into others, at least so altered them from themselves, that which is which cannot be known. Surely this way of arguing is as strong with respect to them as to the sacred writers, unless it had been their peculiar fate to be transcribed only by knaves or blunders; which to suggest has ill nature enough, but very little decency or reason. And which will this carry us? But he goes on, 65 A credible Man vouching in his own knowledge is a good proof. But if do not that equally credible vouches from this report, yet the testimony is weaker, and a third who attests the bear-say of an bear-say is still less considerable. 66 Allow this for truth, that bear-say evidence, or tradition by word of mouth, grows thus weaker by passing through many hands, and that by this means the original fact or truth may, in time, be quite lost; yet when a thing is committed to writing, there can be no such danger of loss or mistake, if a tolerable care be used in transcribing, though the copy cannot be corrected by the original. Ours is not such bear-say evidence, but that

of credible men vouching their own knowledge, which be adjoined is good proof, and leaving this uncertainty in writings, if shown that the original are now lost, they do not appear to have been in any manner of importance, none but what, by several copies compared, may be sufficiently to give us all reasonable ground to think we have their meaning in all necessary things.

But, says he, if no court of judicature will admit of a copy from the original, without such made by a disinterested person, that he has compared it, because the least mistake, as in printing, a parenthesis, a letter misplaced, may alter the sense. How can we depend on things of the greatest moment, delivered in voluminous writings, for often transcribed by men, who never saw the originals (as none of the earliest writers ever pretend they did) and men, who even in the earliest times, if we may judge by the number of forged passages, and even forged books, would scruple no pious frauds? But what have *Yorks* of law to do with common life? Must nothing be admitted as a copy from an original writing, without such disinterested proof, because courts of judicature will not admit it? Is no copy of any credit, where the original is not to be come at, nor can be compared with it, nor such value upon comparison made? Is not this universally the case as to ancient historians, Greek and Latin, nay, and his applauded philosophers? Must the copies we have of them be then deemed perfectly useless, and as such thrown away? What a general wreck would this make of all ancient learning! at once destroyed by the loss of the original, though the copy cannot be corrected by such evidence.

But,

But why this caution in the case of a copy? Why
 to the very mistake, a wrong pointing, a wrong
 margin, and other misplacements, may quite vary the
 sense? Is this alleged in good earnest? What
 then is to be done with writings where there are
 no such distinctions, nor pointings, nor parenthe-
 ses, nor the words themselves separated? Is the
 sense of an author, in such case, unsearchable, not
 possibly to be found out or ascertained? Perhaps
 there is hardly a book copied or printed, without
 some such mistakes. Woful case! because they
 are not, it seems, to be rectified. If the printer
 mispels a word, or misplaces a comma, this may
 spoil the sense; it may, if people read without
 exercising common sense; and if they read *amiss*
 what is rightly written or printed, they may make
 nonsense of it; as may a blundering clerk, in reading
 a copy from a record, attested on oath. What
 then? Is all writing and reading grown there-
 fore useless? Have men no means to rectify such
 mistakes in readers, copiers, or printers, and know
 the true reading? How far do they overshoot,
 when resolved to oppose right or wrong?
 But, Can we depend on things of the great-
 est moment, delivered in voluminous writings, so
 often transcribed by men who never saw the
 original (as none of the earliest writers pretend
 they did) and men, who even in the earliest
 times, if we may judge by the number of forged
 passages, and even forged books, would create
 no pious frauds? Not indeed, if the copy must
 be compared with the original, by a disinter-
 ested person, and attested upon oath. And should
 not this be the case in matters of such moment,
 when in courts of judicature no other will be ad-
 mitted? Can this author call and count this
 argument? Are the rules observed in courts of ju-
 dicature,

dicature, to regulate in all other cases. To the nature of the thing, he knows this to be unreasonable; and the comparison insisted on in the case of the sacred writings, impossible. Where should the originals have been kept for this purpose, and amidst the changes in human affairs have been preserved? How many original records of other things of much later date, have been lost? Is it any wonder these should have undergone the same fate?

THOUGH the contents of these writings be vastly more momentous, than those of other authors, yet if there be no reason to doubt but our copies are transcripts from the apostolical writings, more than books which bear the names of other authors, are transcripts from theirs, why should they not be owned and regarded as such? Is it because they are voluminous writings? So are those of Aristotle, Tully, Livy, &c. Is it because "they have been so often transcribed, by men who never saw the original, as the earliest writers of Christianity never say they did?" Is not this the case as to the authors mentioned? Is there any transcriber who tells us he had seen the original writings of Aristotle, Tully, Livy, &c.? Must we therefore question if ever there were originals, or these were transcripts of them? If in their case this is no right reasoning, why is it alleged here?

THAT there were copies of the apostolical writings, in the earliest times of Christianity, is manifest from the citations of the earliest writers. That there were apostolical writings, from which those copies were taken, cannot be reasonably called in question: Nor can it be more reasonably questioned, whether these transcripts were from those originals. They are cited even by authors contemporary with the apostles, as their writings.

things. The Churches to whom they were directed, must have presently known it, had they been forgeries, and would have detected them. Nor could they have been in any credit, had they not been copies from the originals. Recourse would have been had to the originals. And those who had them in their possession, had they never been copied from the original, or been derived from it, would have proclaimed the cheat, and given notice to all the churches. They would not have suffered so sacred a depositum to be corrupted or sham'd.

In the apostles times, letters from them, to churches, cities or towns, could not have been forged, but themselves would have disclaimed and renounced them. The churches must know if they had received such letters, and must be concerned to keep their trust. Had any such been forged shortly after the apostles times, as were never sent, or copies of those that were, by such as had never seen the original, or were false copies, they would have shewn the forgery without being a pack of fools or knaves; which is no reasonable supposition, I hope. Nor can it be thought, that christians at a distance, would receive such writings without examination into their truth; without supposing them a set of the weakest men, or in confederacy with such forgers; which is a very unnatural and disingenuous suggestion.

Books indeed were forged in the name of Christ and his apostles, very early. Some of which were what he calls pious frauds, the performances of weak men, who sought by this means to recommend their religion to the heathen. But most were the works of hereticks, who endeavoured to corrupt Christianity, and to countenance and support these corruptions. What

then? Must all writings have been forgeries, and
 cause some were? Was there no way to dis-
 tinguish between apostolical writings, and those
 spurious and apocryphal? Or were the first christi-
 ans incapable of making such distinction? Or per-
 fectly careless and unconcerned what writings they
 admitted as divine? Or all in a conspiracy with
 such impostors? Are these reasonable suppo-
 sitions?

Was not the Canon settled very near, if not in
 the very apostolical times? And remains it not, in
 a manner, the same till now? Do not the writers
 of the second century, however remote from one
 another, quote the same books for scripture, and
 the same we now receive as such? Theophilus at
 Antioch in Syria, Irenaeus at Lyons in France, Cle-
 mens at Alexandria in Egypt, and Tertullian at Car-
 thage, &c. Must not this prove, that the scrib-
 bled writings of the apostles had been made pub-
 lick, and that the churches were generally ac-
 quainted with them, before their times? And can
 it be thought, that when there were such a mul-
 titude of forgeries and spurious writings, so few only
 should be owned by them, as apostolical and di-
 vine, but upon evidence? And that in this con-
 troversy, all the churches throughout the world, in
 a manner should agree? Is it not manifest from
 hence, that they made very careful enquiry and
 discrimination? Especially when it is notorious
 to all who consult the writings of the ancients,
 that they were not ignorant of such forgeries. It is
 from their account, and theirs only, that we have
 any notice of such. And when there were discovered
 in any part of the world, it is reasonable to be-
 lieve, they gave notice to others of it. As upon
 the conviction of the *pretor* in *Asia*, who had
 forged

Vide *Jer. Jones*, Canon, Vol. I, II.

forged the *copy* of *Paul* and *Thoma*, notice was given to the church of *Carthage* in *Africa*. For why, in this instance only, should they be supposed to have used this caution?

Have we not catalogues of the books received as *authentic* and *canonical*, in writers of the first age? and these according, for the most part, with one another, and with our present catalogue? And in which, those owned by all the churches, and those doubted by some are distinguished? *Cyril*, anno 210, who took prodigious pains in knowing the scriptures, reckons all the writings we own, excepting the *epistles* of *James* and *Jude*. *Rufinus*, anno 315, who was very careful to enquire what writings were *genuine*, and what not, gives us the same catalogue; only tells us, the *epistles* of *James* and *Jude*, the *second* of *Peter*, and *third* of *John*, had been doubted by some, though generally received; and the *Revelation* some received, and others rejected. *Albanasius*, anno 315, gives us a catalogue, the same with ours. *Cyril*, anno 340, only omits the *Revelation*. So the *Council* of *Laodicea*, anno 364. *Epiphanius*, anno 370, gives the same catalogue with ours. *Gregory Nazianzen*, anno 375, omits the *Revelation*. *Ierom*, anno 382, gives the same with ours, but speaks doubtfully of the *epistle* to the *Hebrews*. *Rufinus*, anno 390, has a catalogue the same with ours. Such has *Austin*, anno 394, and the *XLIV Bishops*, assembled in the *Council* of *Carthage*, the same.

It is plain from hence, that the ancient church did not take this matter upon trust. Or, why should so many forged writings, be unanimously rejected by them, no one admitting one of them to the *Canon*? Or of those received by most, why

should any doubt, but because they had not the same assurance and evidence that they were genuine apostolical writings. This shows that they were not fearless of deceit, nor easily believing, but were wise and wary, and would be well satisfied, writings were apostolical and divine, before they received them as such. And such satisfaction some might sooner obtain than others, from the better opportunities they had of coming at the sight of the originals, or getting good information from the churches to which they were directed concerning them.

They doubtless knew these to be the hand-writing of him whose name they bore, or the messenger who brought them gave evidence they were authentic; or the writings themselves had certain marks to assure them they were the *genuine*, if not hand-writing of the apostles. Thus Paul closes his second epistle to the Thessalonians: *The salutation of me, Paul, with my own hand, which is my token in every epistle.* Thus were his genuine writings distinguished from all counterfeits, which a passage in the same epistle seems to intimate were even then in being: *Be not shaken in mind, neither by spirit, nor by letter, as from us, unto whom it is due.* If there were such counterfeits then, it cannot be reasonably doubted, but the apostles took all due care, that their genuine writings should be known from counterfeits.

And what has been said, affords us very good evidence, that they were careful to observe these directions. The numerous *forgeries* of the first times, many of which are lost, and several have come down to us, were unanimously rejected by the churches; and all rested by degrees, in our hands. *Vide per. Boet. Can. Vol. I. p. 30.*

them? Or if he did, would he not be obliged
to say, that the sacred books are not in an
estate, long in the possession of the world, but a
may be that the sacred books are not in an
make his right position, and this should
on no other basis, but that the sacred books have
been forged, without any attempt at proof. His
are such? And why should we be so suspicious
suspicious and suspicious, in the matter of religion,
when the same suspicions and suspicions, introduced
into human affairs, would throw all the things,
and bring on universal uncertainty and dissension,
discord and confusion, which is the case in the
This suggestion, that there are numbers of for-
ged passages in our sacred books, is may be, be-
cause there have been such passages, it would then
unfair. If any such there are, we should have
pointed them out, and by proper evidence shown
their forgery. We and we should believe they
conclude, that because such a thing may be, it
certainly is. It is plain, he writes for such as
would have the point proved before hand, and will
admit what he offers for proof, without examina-
tion. I know of no such passages in our copies,
much less in great numbers, and on which any
doctrine or duty of importance depends. When
such can be produced and proved to be what he
pretends, they will be exploded; all that is say-
ing there are or may be such forged passages in
our sacred books, is not reasoning, but rather argu-
ing to discredit our religion by insinuation; which
if he can reconcile with reason, justice, or the re-
ligion of nature, I cannot.

But, says he, "If those men, in whose hands
the sacred books have, from time to time, always
been deposited, believed that a certain set of
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"in opinion was necessary to salvation, they must
 "in charity have thought themselves obliged to
 "take the most proper methods that men might
 "embrace them. And therefore must have be-
 "lieved themselves obliged to substitute some
 "words of their own, to express those opinions
 "best, on which men's salvation depended, in-
 "stead of others apt to lead them into fatal errors.
 "And must not the same principle that made
 "them impose their own words instead of God's
 "make them act the same part with relation
 "to the scriptures?" It is really to be lamented,
 that men, by imposing their own words or sense
 on the churches, in matters of doubt or difficulty,
 should give such an handle to unbelievers. They
 have been highly injurious to the churches, guilty
 of flagrant usurpation, and done no little disservice
 to the christian cause. And it were to be wished,
 that christians would, for the future, be wiser.
Fas est et ab hoste doceri.

But the inference he would draw from this con-
 duct, seems not to me to be in necessary connexion
 with any self-evident notions. Fervent and mi-
 staken zeal, impatience of contradiction, fondness
 for one's own sentiments, with no little spice of
 ambition, may have prompted men to impose their
 words on others, and lay more stress on them in
 point of salvation, than they ought. And it was
 easy to deceive themselves into a belief, this was
 done out of charity, and disguise their true prin-
 ciples of acting by such a cover. But supposing
 charity the true principle, by which some men
 were guided in this matter, it does not appear to
 me, that they must think themselves obliged to
 change the word of God, and insert their own
 words, where they thought they would better ex-
 press their sense, and be more apt to guard from
 error.

error. I cannot see that a principle of charity must lay them under such necessity. For, wherever charity might prompt them to do, a veneration for the sacred writings, which all christians have had, or professed to have, might have *balanced* the mentioned principle, and restrained them from this way of exercising their charity. And however proper a means *this* might appear to them for *their* purpose, making so bold with the word of God might appear to them much *more improper*. So that I cannot see, that they *must* have believed it their duty to act this part, that men might be secured from *dangerous errors*.

BUT, perhaps it will be said, "that if it will not follow that they *must* have acted this part, is it not very likely that they *have*?" And what assurance can we have that it is *genuine christianity*, contained in our present sacred books? This is very far from being likely. It seems next to impossible. Indeed, had *all* the sacred copies been in *their* hands, who were of *that* humour, it had been more likely; But as this case was in fact, not at all so. These books were read in *christian* assemblies, copies of them must have been in multitudes of *private hands*; all being allowed and encouraged to read them. They must have been in too many hands, to have been thus corrupted. The several *parties* and *sects* among christians were, in this respect, a continual check on one another. *Impalers* were seldom without *opposers*, who had copies of these writings as well as they. There seems, therefore, to have been *no room* for such an attempt. Whatever *inclination* of this sort might be in *any*, they must have been discouraged from proceeding, because not *practicable*. Regard to their *own reputation* would have withheld them. Loud outcries would have been made.

made, on detection, by those in opposite sentiments; and their interpretations of scripture had become suspected by all. It must have ended in the ruin of their cause, and their own confusion. So that the inference he would draw, from the conduct of such imposters, is so far from being necessary, that the fact suggested appears utterly improbable, if not impossible.

But what appearance is there, that in any copies extant there has been any substitution of such technical terms? Do we meet with any trace of the famous *quousiam*, the first term of this kind imposed on the churches? Do we any where read of the *hypothetical union*? And when *Arianism* was routed, and the churches in general were professed believers of the *Trinity in Unity*, and there was least danger of an *auto*, against substituting these terms, if imposters play'd such tricks with scripture, whence is it that none of these terms are to be found there? Nay, the *Papists*, whose *creeds* have so little countenance from scripture, and who speak more dishonourably of it than any *alumni christiani*, have not introduced any technical terms into scripture; nor yet when in the *western world* they acted without control, and had none to contradict and oppose them. And when this is the case in fact, none of these imposed terms appear in any of our copies, whether more ancient or modern, but the same language occurs throughout, is not this next to demonstration, that no such tricks have been play'd with these writings, as he would insinuate.

But,

By the way, this seems an argument with me, that the famous text in *John*, was no interpolation of the *Arianists*; for if for their purpose, they inserted this passage, why did they not make it speak home? And to these *Three are one*, have added, *consubstantial*, *co-equal*, and *co-eternal*, and carried the point against all opposers?

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copies are of a book, though every one may differ in some readings, the more correct may the book be made by comparing these with one another. And where only one copy of an author is to be come at, as *Velleius Paterculus* of the Latins, and *Hesychius* of the Greeks, they are, and are likely to continue, an heap of errors, after all the pains the critics can take about them. And why should what is plainly an advantage to every other author, be made an objection to the sacred writings, and used as an argument to weaken their authority?

"THE world, says he, will hardly believe, that in a book where *most things* are owned to be of the *greatest moment*, there should be so many various readings of *no moment*, though one or two may be of *that consequence*, as to destroy the design of the book." No christian thinks all parts of the bible of *equal moment*: The most momentous, are the *terms* of our acceptance with God, the *scheme* of christian duty, the *motives* to enforce its performance, and the *evangelical facts* on which our faith and hopes as christians are founded. One may venture to affirm, that these *necessary* things are to be found in *any one copy* whence the various readings are collected, and repeated in many places; and if so, as to the *main design* of these writings, the various lections are of *no moment*. If these things are not delivered in the *same words* in all, yet if they are in words of the *same meaning*, what matters the variety of *phrase*?

WHAT he means by saying *one or two* various readings may be of *such consequence*, as to spoil the design of the book, I do not understand. Should these readings be not only *different*, but *contradictory*, and that in an article of importance, there

there is no *single passage* on which such stress is to be laid, as is here suggested. And if there are other *passages* relating to the same matter, every one must know, who has but common sense, that *that* reading which contradicts these passages cannot be *not true*. But he should have pointed out some *such lessons* as would have ruined the design of Christianity, if he could. The thirty thousand readings are before the world, and he might have examined them, and shown which were so malicious, if he could, and not have endeavoured to poison the world in *disfavour* of Christianity, by this *general* talk, which is sophistical and fallacious. But the *similitude* with which he illustrates this argument, appears to me very little to his purpose. If one may be poisoned, by one poisonous ingredient in a prescription, where he *cannot* distinguish wholesome from unwholesome, must a man be in like danger, where amidst various *wholesome* rules of life one *unwholesome* one may occur, when he has his discerning faculties, and may exercise his reason, in distinguishing one from the other? And yet, from what has been said, it appears, notwithstanding all this *magnified* account of the various readings, there is really no such danger, no *poisonous ingredient* to be feared. And whoever will consult *Mill's*, or even *Wetstein's Greek Testament*, with the various lessons, will quickly receive satisfaction as to this matter.

But, says he, "Can people, if *incapable* of distinguishing by their reason, between truth and falsehood, have any thing more to plead for the truth of their religion, than that they believe it true, because *their priests*, hired to maintain it, tell them, it was long ago revealed to

"certain men, who, as they on their *priests* *what*
assure them, were *too wise* to be imposed on
 themselves, and *too honest* to impose on others."
 And that no change could have been made
 in this religion in after times, the care then
 of their *own* souls, as well as their natu-
 ral affection for their *posterity*, obliging them
 to hand down their religion, just as they re-
 ceived it. And that it was morally impossible
 innovations should come in, since it would be
 the highest folly, in any, to attempt to in-
 duce new *doctrines* as a tradition received from
 their ancestors, when all must know they had re-
 ceived no such traditions, which is all the bulk of
 mankind can lay for their *traditional* religion, if
 they cannot judge from the *doctrines themselves*.
 This is one specimen, among many, of this
 author's great candor and fair reasoning. He
 knows the writer, for Christianity allow that
 men have reason to distinguish between truth
 and falsehood in religion. They would have them
 use their reason, in enquiring into the *truth* and
 contents of the christian revelation. They allow,
 that a revelation from God must have such in-
 ternal marks, as will satisfy any reasonable man
 that it is *not unworthy* of God, but, rather, such
 as may be from him, though they will not prove
 it *must*, but leave room for some *external attesta-
 tion* to it; in which case, *miracles* are a proper
 evidence that it is divine. What reason tells
 them may be from God, miracles testify is from
 him. They do not require them to believe,
 merely because their *priests* tell them so, "That
 their religion was long ago revealed to certain
 men, &c." but they offer them *proof* for this, that
 is rational and convincing, and, in all other cases,
 would satisfy any reasonable man, as rational
 and

and convincing, as *this author* can have, for the truth of any thing reported in *ancient history*, and even more so, from corroborating circumstances. They offer them the *same proof*, that there was such a person as *Jesus of Nazareth*; that he preached, and wrought miracles; that he was crucified and rose from the dead; that he poured out his Spirit on his apostles; and that they went out in his name, preached him to the world, and had great, signal, and even miraculous success in it; as he has, or can have, that there was such a person as *Julius Cæsar*; that he conquered *Gaul*, brought an army into *Britain*, beat *Pompey*, assumed the chief power, and changed the *Roman Republic* into an empire. The *same proof*, that the evangelists wrote the *four Gospels*; the apostles their several *Epistles* for the churches use; as he can have, that *Cæsar* wrote his *Commentaries*; *Livy* the *Roman History*; or *Tully* his *Epistles*, &c. The *same proof*, that the Apostles were honest reporters of what they had seen, and received in charge from heaven; and much better and stronger than he can have, for the veracity of any ancient historian. In short, they offer *such proof*, that should it be insufficient, must ruin the credit of *all* ancient history, and render every thing unfit to be believed but what men see with their eyes. And of *this* evidence the bulk of mankind, if they apply their minds to the matter, are as good judges, and, perhaps better, than of abstracted reasonings in points of morality, and their connexion with *self-evident notions*. They do not require them, "On the priests word, to believe no change could be made in their religion in after times, because the care men have of their own souls, &c." They know there have been *innovations* and *changes* in the christian

Christian religion; that it has been greatly corrupted and depraved; that men have not such value for their own souls, nor such regard to posterity, as to hand down their religion just as they have received it. They know and own, that ill and sinful men have introduced doctrines, usages, rites, &c. that were none of the institutions of Christianity. But they at the same time tell men, that the *holy scriptures* are the rule of our religion; that these have been handed down to us pure and incorrupt in all matters of importance; and offer proof for this, that is rational and convincing, and carries evidence with it, of which themselves may judge. And finally, that by *these writings* they may, and should examine all doctrines and practices given out to be divine, or founded on this revelation, and not take their *priests* words merely for them.

Some *priests*, it must be owned, require too implicit a belief in themselves; and in too many christian countries free examination of the established religion, and the evidences for it, will not be endured. But this is not to be imputed to Christianity; it recommends, it allows no such practices, but offers it self to free examination: It is wholly owing to the vices of men. And whilst men are what they are, the purest and best religion in the world will be liable to corruption and abuse; and men of worldly minds will endeavour to accommodate it to their own interests, and the bulk of mankind will be liable to be imposed on. So the religion of nature was corrupted with idolatry and superstition; and is to this day in all parts of the heathen world; and it is likely will be, till God pours out a new spirit on men; or they all come into our author's scheme, and make religion and patriotism the self same thing.

BUT

But because the christian religion is thus liable to be corrupted, is it therefore not divine? Or if it be, not deserving regard? And then, though it explains and enforces the religion of nature, and why then should the religion of nature be regarded? Must not this explode all religion, that of nature, as well as what is revealed? Religion, in every state, is liable to be corrupted, as the ministers of it are to be corrupt: what then? Must we have no religion, till we have one man cannot corrupt, or ministers are free from all the imperfections of human nature? Is this reasoning or rant?

But, says he, "There must be such *internal* marks fixed to every part of the true religion, as will enable the bulk of mankind to distinguish it from all false religions, or else all traditional religions are on a level." How so? "Since those in every country who are *bred* to maintain them, will not fail to assert they have all external marks, such as uninterrupted traditions, uncontested miracles, confession of adventures, number of proselytes, agreement among themselves, and all the other arguments, papists and mahometans, as he says, set such a value on. What can the people, who understand not a word of the language wherein their religion, and the external proofs of it were originally written, do, but be of the religion wherein they are educated? Especially, if nothing be suffered to be published that may in the least tend to make its truth *questionable*, and all other religions are represented as full of the grossest absurdities."

It is very true, that, if what this author takes here for granted, be allowed, viz. that all tradi-

tionary religions are to be believed, merely, because the priests tell men they are from heaven; and that the priests of all religions to a man, are a pack of wicked cheats, who make it their business, for their own interests and ends, to deceive the rest of mankind; all traditionary religions are upon a level, and equally deserving no credit. But is this reasoning or abuse? Gross abuse of Christianity, the reader, and many in the priesthood, who are as strict observers of the laws of nature, and as good patriots as any priest-haters. He knows that christians build not their faith on the tales of any priests; at least, are under no necessity so to do, though in fact many professors of Christianity, as well as others, are too liable to act with implicit faith, and fall in with current sentiments and usages in religion, without examination. But it is very unfair, for him to take all this talk for granted, and then set Christianity on a level with all other traditionary religions.

If Mahometans as well as Papists, boast traditions, miracles, &c. will this set their religion upon a level with genuine Christianity? Indeed, I never did hear, that Mahometans did boast any miracles, but that of Mahomet's composing so divine a book as the *Alcoran*, who never learnt his letters. What a miracle this was, they who know who were his assistants, can easily judge. And what *uncontested* miracles (to say nothing of the rest) Papists have to boast, for their corruptions of Christianity, himself is not ignorant. They are wrought among the ignorant, unlearned, and credulous vulgar, in countries where none dare to dispute or examine them, not in Protestant countries, for the conviction of hereticks. Are these like the miracles wrought by the first preachers

faithfully conveyed to us. ers of the gospel, that carried such uncontrollable evidence, even among people who had the *deepest* prejudices against their religion, as in a few years to make multitudes of converts, and in a few ages to root pagan idolatry out of the Roman empire.

Had the religion of Jesus, any worldly power on its side? Had it not all the learning and power of the world to contend with, notwithstanding this triumph over false religion? Whereas Mahomet's religion was propagated by the sword and conquest, and an accommodation to the *secular* appetites, to which Christianity gave no encouragement. And popery is supported by worldly avarice on one hand, and humouring men's vices on the other; nor, with all its boasted miracles, will allow of any free debate about it. Christian religion had nothing in it, to humour the corrupt tastes of men; nor could it spread and prevail in the world, without any secular supports, but by recommending it self to every man's reason and conscience, by its internal excellency, and the demonstration of the spirit and power, that went along with it: Without such extraordinary powers, no rational account can be given of its wide and speedy diffusion. By natural means it looks utterly impossible.

Is this religion upon a level with Mahometanism or Popery? Have we no foundations for our belief of it, but the tales of priests, and their talk of miracles, traditions, &c? Knowledge of past events can, indeed, be had by tradition only. But are all traditions equally to be depended on? Can any history come better recommended and attested, than that of the publication and spread of our holy religion? Can we have better vouchers for the genuineness of any ancient authors, than for that

of our sacred books. And yet our religion stands on a level with the impostures of *Mabomet*, and corruptions of popery, and have no better grounds for belief.

Indeed, many who profess it, may have no better reasons for it, than that it is the religion of their ancestors or their country, and that their priests tell them it is divine. This may be the chief reason with the many, the majority, the bulk of those who profess it, especially in countries, where nothing is suffered, that may in the least tend to make its truth questionable. But though it is thus in fact, yet upon a level with other traditional religions, by such believers in their priests and ancestors, yet, to assert that it must be set on the level, because we have no better reasons for believing it, is what one may be bold to say, *this author*, in his conscience believes not to be true.

And men, who understand not the original language, have no need to believe just what their priests tell them. They may have rational satisfaction, that even in translations, they have the sense of the original, in all matters of importance. And if they are not indolent, indifferent, and remiss, if they are willing to have satisfaction concerning the evidences of their religion, they have it in their power to come at it. They may consult both its adversaries and advocates, and hear what is said against it, and for it; and examining the cause on both sides, may give judgment. The argument does not lie out of their reach. It is full as level to their capacities, as a deduction of the laws of nature, from self-evident notions. So that there is no need for them to take their religion upon trust from any priests, neither what it is, nor what evidence there is for it. They may know the first.

* Vide page 100, supra.

first, by consulting the sacred writings, and the other in the way mentioned, and in both cases judge for themselves, whether christian religion be divine, though there be not "internal marks" affixed to every part of it, to make this our business. In a general scope and design of christian revelation, they may plainly see is to teach and propagate true, inward, and spiritual religion, and the whole law of nature in all its branches, or genuine morality in its full sense. They may plainly see there is nothing in it repugnant to reason, or to render it unworthy to have God for its author. They may have satisfaction, whether miracles were wrought in confirmation of it, and what an attestation this is to its divine original. They may enquire into the qualifications and circumstances of the first ministers of it, and whether their testimony, as to external facts, and internal revelations, deserves credit. They may know, whether these ministers left any account of their religion in writing, and whether those writings we have, are forgeries in their names, or genuine; and whether they have been corrupted in any material and important passages. And upon enquiry, they will find we have evidence for all; which, if it should be called in question, must destroy the credit of all history. Nothing of it is deserving credit, if that of christianity be destroy'd, by what its adversaries alledge against it.

NAY, I am mistaken, if the weak things objected against it, by this very author, will not confirm christians in the belief of it; when they see he has nothing to object to the credibility of the first preachers, but that they were men, and had some frailties in common with others, and were not in all instances infallible and impeccable.

WHEN

WHEN they see he has nothing to object to the truth of the *facts* reported, or *miracles* wrought by them; but only insinuates, that suggestions may be made to men's minds, and miracles may be wrought by *evil spirits*, without attempting to prove, apostolical revelations and miracles had *factitious* for their authors. And it is, indeed, utterly incredible, that *such beings* should furnish any with such powers to spread a religion so much for the honour of God, and happiness of mankind, as christian religion must, to every unprejudiced eye, appear upon view.

WHEN they see he does not attempt to prove any of our *sacred writings* are *forgeries*, though he insinuates they may be, because there were books uttered in the *apostles names*, in the first ages, which they did not pen. But he is not so far as to let his readers know, that these were detected and disowned by the churches; as the first writers assure us they were. Whereas the *antiqueness* of most of the books received by us, was never questioned; and those that were doubted, (which at most were *very few*) and for a time rejected by *some*, were, upon good satisfaction that they were *genuine*, generally received into the *Canon*, which none of these forgeries ever were. These were the issue of the ancient *heretics*, who all dy'd away of themselves, before the empire became *christian*, and e'er civil power was employ'd in suppressing such.

WHEN they see, that notwithstanding his suggestions, that there may be *corruptions* of such importance, amidst thirty thousand various lessons in our *copies*, as to ruin the design of our religion, he never points out *any such*, though these various lessons were easy to come at; but contents himself with telling us, "the world will hardly believe

believe that should be no such corruption among so many readings. Which is only cheating the university into the belief, by mere

When they hear that there occurs nothing for which he makes so pompous a story, are common with the *New Testament*, to all ancient books, of which we have divers copies. Nay, a much less number of copies have yielded as many various lections, or more in proportion, in authors less voluminous. Not do any of them appear to be of such importance, as to hurt the design of christianity, much less destroy it.

When they see, that though he suggests, those who had our sacred books in their keeping, and were for substituting their own words, as more apt to guard from error, than God's, in their *Creeds*, would think themselves obliged to make a like substitution in their copies: he offers not to give any one instance. And manifest it is, there are no such *technical terms* in any of our present copies, to give the least countenance to such an *innuendo*.

When christians shall see such weak attacks made on the evidences of their religion, by a work, so long laboured and reviewed, what can they think, but that the enemies of christianity have nothing material or important to object against it? They would not fall upon it with *may be's*, deal in *innuendo's*, and put the world off with *suggestions and insinuations*, instead of

Dr. Bentley affirms, himself has seen twenty thousand various lections in *Terence*, in less than half the number of MSS. collated for these readings in the *New Testament*, and the *Persons* and the *Fathers* have been consulted in this case, as well as the *Copier*: And doubts not, but in as many copies, the various readings of *Terence* would exceed those in the *Letter to Freestinker*, by *Philaleas. Lipsiensis*.

and direct Proof. They would have given proof of the falsehood of facts, and the fallacy and corruption of reasoning, had it been in their power. When such a master of reason as this author, who understands it so well, and lays such a stress on it, and can distinguish so well between demonstrations and probabilities, attacks Christianity with such harmless argument, and weapons so blunt, can one forbear retorting on him his vain insult over Dr. Clarke?

But before I proceed to this, it may not be

Si Pergamus deinde

Eventi possint, certe hoc magis sufficit

Now concerning such

Could christian faith indeed have been over

This mighty hand the feat had doubtless done

What can firmists do, when this champion this

being makes so harmless an assault, and conceals

himself with stale objections and suggestions, long

ago answered?

power to do, but as we shall see

where we cannot see into the reason of an con-

Sub §. III. His Objections to all positive institu-

tions in religion, and to Christianity on this ac-

count, considered

Is it not becoming talk?

OUR author has another objection to christi-

anity which one would think his principal, but

could he enlarge so much on it. There are some

few positive institutions in Christianity. These, he

would persuade the world, are inconsistent with

the perfections of God, and an abuse of his go-

verning power. And hence would conclude, that

a religion from God can have no such institutions

no more referred in it. All the commands of God

must be founded in the nature of things, must have

a reason for it, antecedent to the command, and

obvious

2. 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16. 17. 18. 19. 20. 21. 22. 23. 24. 25. 26. 27. 28. 29. 30. 31. 32. 33. 34. 35. 36. 37. 38. 39. 40. 41. 42. 43. 44. 45. 46. 47. 48. 49. 50. 51. 52. 53. 54. 55. 56. 57. 58. 59. 60. 61. 62. 63. 64. 65. 66. 67. 68. 69. 70. 71. 72. 73. 74. 75. 76. 77. 78. 79. 80. 81. 82. 83. 84. 85. 86. 87. 88. 89. 90. 91. 92. 93. 94. 95. 96. 97. 98. 99. 100.

opposed to the subject to whom he is given, and having necessary and natural connection with the good. Otherwise God would not act reasonably and kindly, nor be what himself is, wise and good, and virtuous. This is the sum of his arguments, *pro* and *con*, against them, to which he adds others from their *intrinsic* tendency. I shall endeavour to reduce all his talk to some point, and see whether it has for force in it, be feeling to imagine.

BUT before I proceed to this, it may not be improper, in a few observations, to set this matter concerning positives in general, and those of Christianity in a true light. Now concerning such, I would observe,

First, *There may be reasons for such institutions appearing to infinite wisdom, which yet may lie out of our reach.* If our reason is to direct us in every case, where God does not interpose, must he be directed by it too? Has he left himself no power to act, but as we shall approve? And where we cannot see into the reason of his conduct, is it agreeable to the nature of truth, for us to conclude he has no reason, and that he acts unwisely in such instances? Is this *Christian* language? Is it sober becoming talk? Is it not rather wild and presumptuous? Is it not more becoming *his* dreamers, when his pleasure is unknown, to conclude he may have, and doubtless has, good reasons for what he enjoins, though we see them not? Is he altogether *such* an unwise being? Is our understanding on a level with his? And are our views as comprehensive? Is not this claiming his perfections and prerogatives, which one would think not a little unwarrantable in nature.

and is it not a violation of the command, and

words

O 2

I

Secondly,

I

Secondly, if I know *several* reasons why the *supreme* ruler may not, in some cases, relate the unlimited authority that belongs to him; and make this a reason of his commands: Or, in other words, require some things, because it is his pleasure in this way to have his sovereign authority acknowledged. So I can say it is, that his authority is *undervied* & is in wholly from himself, and must therefore be *undervied* too, except by the perfection of his own nature, or his will, always directed by them. If it seems meet to him to challenge such authority, has he not a right to it? And who shall presume to control him in the exercise of it? And how shall such authority be claimed, but by requiring obedience to his will and pleasure? If he only require obedience to commands, for which his creatures can see an antecedent reason, this is not obedience to absolute authority: but to a command for which I can see another reason besides the ruler's pleasure. It may, indeed, be obeyed, out of regard to the ruler's authority too: But this does not appear so plainly to be the *reason* of obedience, which must be the case, when there is *no other* apparent reason. But if God's authority be *absolute*, if he may require obedience as to such authority, which seems a necessary consequence from the former, I cannot see why, in some cases, he may not require his creatures to do some things, without assigning any other reason for what is enjoined, but his pleasure, and give laws in this fullest sense *positive*, as well as others evidently founded in the reason of things. Indeed, such commands must be also thus founded, if it be agreeable to reason and the nature of things, that he should at any time, and in any case, exercise that authority, which is his undoubted right; which,

which, one would think, none should doubt. Nor
 will this make God an arbitrary governor in any
 bad sense, nor otherwise than the nature and reason
 of things allow. To suppose, that he would
 not be proper, because the perfections of his na-
 ture are not to be display'd in his government; his
 wisdom and goodness are to be seen in it, as well
 as his power. But when he has manifested his
 kindness so much to his reasonable creatures, in
 the law of nature, and so evidently framed it, to
 subserve their happiness; one would think it were
 not a little too assuming, for any man to pre-
 tend, that he must in no case act otherwise, nor
 in any one instance, as a Being of unlimited au-
 thority over his creatures, nor require any thing
 from them, as a recognition of his authority; but
 that only which they feel has an antecedent,
 natural, and necessary tendency to their good. This
 were to make a mere tool of the Supreme Ruler;
 and, in effect, tie him down to the direction of
 his creatures. He must have no regard to his
 own rights, nor offer to claim them, any farther
 than they shall judge it for their good. Is this a
 notion of such a governor as the great God, that
 is agreeable to the reason and nature of things?
 Surely his creatures should, with all thankful-
 ness, acknowledge his goodness, in framing the
 law of nature with so much regard to their good,
 and with all dutiful readiness, perform whatever
 duty else he requires. One would think this should
 be an high instance of morality. It is duty natural-
 ly owing to such a governor; whenever he, in his
 wisdom, shall think fit to require it. If the thing
 enjoined be not natural duty, it is certainly a na-
 tural duty, to own the sovereign authority of God,
 and pay obedience to these injunctions.

Thirdly, The positive institutions of Christianity, though not absolutely necessary to the good of mankind, have yet a fitness in them to promote it, and seem evidently intended by God for this end. They are not commands for mere commanding sake; but are fitted and intended to subserve morality, and promote love to God and man: So that though God has a right to claim unlimited authority over his creatures, and require obedience to his mere pleasure, he does not exercise such right in his evangelical institutions, but designs his creatures good in them. Nay, several of the peculiar commands of the gospel are founded in the reason of things, even in his sense admitting things to be as the gospel reports. Such are the honours to be paid the Mediator, and faith in him. For supposing him the great prophet and teacher sent from God, and the great high priest of his people, by whom they have pardon of sin, and access to God, should he not be *exalted, honoured, and trusted* in these offices? Must not every one see there is a natural reason why this duty should be paid, the facts being allowed?

THE institutions of Christianity may be reduced to these four: viz. The observation of the Lord's Day, the Christian Ministry, and the two Sacraments, as commonly called. As to the first: It is naturally fit, that God should be publicly worshipped. It is naturally as fit, that some time should be set apart for this purpose. If God takes upon him to ascertain this time, and require a seventh part of ours to be appropriated to this purpose, is it not presumptuous in any man to say, this is passing the bounds of his power, and that he should leave it to mankind to allot time for it, as they shall judge will suit with their conveniences?

Is it not so important a point should be left thus at large? May not all the ordinary concerns of mankind be made to suit this appropriation of time to religious worship? And if the unexpected urgent necessities of mankind require it, the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath. But if it be in the power of the supreme Ruler, to appropriate such a part of time to his worship, that the first day of the week should be his day, is, surely, very reasonable and fit among christians, because on that day *Jesus rose from the dead*. As to the Christian Ministry, is it not founded in reason, supposing men are to be instructed in religion? For though this author talks so much of the sufficiency of reason to guide all men, there never was a civilized nation, but had *masters* of the sciences and morality. And sure it must be of use, that christian religion should be explained and enforced, by men making this *their business*. It is true, it was and will be in the power of such men, to corrupt their religion, and make an handle of it, to *misuse* and *pervert* themselves, and enslave men's consciences and bodies too, if the people are not on their guard. But an institution reasonable and useful in *itself*, and appointed of God for *valuable ends*, is not to be blamed, because men have abused, and still may abuse it. It is through neglect and abuse of reason, so much cry'd up by this author, as the best gift of God to mankind, that there have been such gross corruptions of the religion of nature in the world. Is reason therefore to be run down, renounced, and discarded? And if not, why should a christian ministry, because some in it have been false to their trust, corrupted their religion, and enslaved mankind? They were

employed to preach and spread religion, and were authorized indeed to *live of the Gospel*. They had no authority given them to *lord it over the faith of mankind*, nor erect a *secular empire*; to grasp all the wealth and power they can, and make their *humanity* and *divine religion*, an instrument to promote their *earthly designs*. Against such abuse and corruption, it was the concern of the people to guard; both for religion's sake and *their own*. If they did not, themselves, in some respect, must bear the blame.

THIS SUPERSTITION, it seems, is the peculiar *vice* of mankind; and this has, at all times, rendered them liable to be practised on by those, who by a confident pretence to be more knowing than their neighbours, have circumvented the *many*, the *credulous*, the *un- wary*, and forced the *free-thinking few* into an *outward compliance*. How then should such abuse and corruption be avoided, if the *many* are so credulous, and *unwary*, and the *few* are so complying? If those pretending to know more than their neighbours, will practise upon, and circumvent the *many*, and those who know better, will yet, to shun danger, comply with what they inwardly condemn, I cannot see how this state of things can be amended, unless God miraculously interposes, to heal this common weakness. And when his hand was going, it is much he had not made his *not doing this*, inconsistent with his design in making man. But his design, if he could, was to make Christianity inconsistent with *divine goodness*, and the *foible* of mankind affording him an handle to decry the *priesthood*, he was willing for this good service, to let it stand, without making it any reproach to *divine goodness*.

ness: Though it was occasioned by the profane doing
 so much mischief, yet would think it should con-
 tribute to its reproof, as well as the mischief
 they do. But neither can be any just reproof
 for it, unless the goodness of God obliges him to
 prevent all the folly and wickedness of his people,
 and all their painful consequences. To assert this,
 in defiance of plain fact, is not to honour divine
 goodness, but blaspheme it. being of ages old
 that the two Sacraments, *viz.* Baptism, and the
 Lord's Supper, are the only proper rituals of our
 religion: These are manifestly ordained to serve
 excellent ends, and promote the practice of the
 religion of nature in its full sense, or piety towards
 God, justice and good-will towards men, and so-
 briety in the conduct of one's self. And there is
 a merciful condescension to the present weakness
 of mankind in them. They are *symbolical Rites*,
 in which, by sensible Signs, things spiritual are
 represented. In Baptism, the outward washing
 signifies the *washing away of sin*, or being cleansed
 from the guilt and defilement of it, by the
 Blood and Spirit of the Redeemer; and one *dy-
 ing with him to sin, and rising to newness of life*. In
 the other Sacrament, the Bread and Wine bro-
 ken and poured out, represent the Body of Christ
 slain, and his Blood poured forth, to forgive men
 from *death*, deserved by *their* sin, and procure
 them the divine favour, more strictly speak-
 ing, to remove what was *before* to *his* sin. Now
 our author observes, That sensible
 things make a deeper impression on the minds
 of common people, than words can. He might
 have said of all people, mankind being *more*
rational, but Beings with a mixture of sense and
 reason. And reason, assisted by sense, is in
 many

^u Acts xxii. 16.

^x Rom. vi. 3, 4.

in many instances, more powerful in its operation
and the mind is more awed and influenced by
it. And where mankind are so much immersed
in it, as at present, it is kind to the supreme
Deity, to lead their reason and affections, by
such symbolical institutions, whilst they are not
of themselves, and go away, as to another spiritual
religion, but so plain and simple as to promote
the worship of God.

But the objects of such Rituals, and Symbols
in religion are arbitrary marks, whose mean-
ing cannot be known, but from words, and
not being capable of expressing things more
fully than words, are needless. But admitting
they do not express things more fully than words,
they may in a more lively, affecting, and im-
pressive manner. The poet, who was certainly as
good a judge as our author, tells us;

Segnius irritant animos demissa per aures

Quam quæ sunt oculis subjecta fidelibus.

Horat.

Things thro' the Ear more slowly touch the Heart,

Than where the observing Eye can add its Part.

But when he adds, words being but arbitrary

signs, to multiply such signs needlessly, would

be absurd. I do not well understand him.

Words when, by common use authorized,

their meaning fixed, are not perfectly arbitrary

signs. He who should affix a meaning of his

own to them, different from what is usual and

common, would talk as unintelligibly, as if he

spoke a foreign language. And what he drives at,
in this decrying words, unless it be to reduce

all

all men to self-torment, by the more light within them, and all religious assemblies to more magnificence, and thus pass the bounds of duty, if it falls out so. If any worship be so to be offered up to God in common, whether in adoration, prayer, or thanksgiving, it must be in words. And if religious instruction be needful, this also must be by words, as arbitrary signs as they are. But of religious worship of this sort, perhaps he has no notion. *Revelations* and the imitation of God in benevolence to society, being with him, the whole of natural duty and divine worship. But if divine wisdom, for such reasons as have been given, or any other, has thought fit, that not only words, but signs more arbitrary than they should be used in his worship, however needful this author may think them, I can never call this absurd; nor can he expect his bare word should pass for proof it is so. I cannot but think divine wisdom a better judge of what is useful or needful in worship, than he.

But, says he, "If sensible things make a deeper impression on the common people, that, I presume, is a just reason against their use in religion." But his presumption is no proof, one would hope, without any reason to support it: What is this just reason? "Because the vulgar, who generally look no farther than externals, do not use them barely as words, to express their meaning, but conjoin in them, I know not what internal holiness, and think such symbolical representations necessary, as the things represented by them." Nay, by degrees, forgetting the reason of their institution, come to idolize them, as the Israelites did the brazen serpent. And this the people have already done in

“In all religions, where such *symbolical representations* have been used, we can’t overlook the inconsistency of *author* in his way of talking. Sometimes the power of reason, and sufficiency of natural light to guide all men, vulgar and *vulgar*, in matters of religion, is cry’d up by him to the highest. Religion is, and ought to be level ground for *all*. At other times, the bulk of mankind are such shallow weak-headed things, that they can not draw a *figurative* from a plain expression; but are under an inevitable necessity to *misunderstand* almost every precept in the Gospel. And here the *vulgar* generally look no farther than *externals*; that is, concern not themselves about what is *internal* in religion. They must therefore be exceeding likely to be guided by the light of *reason* in it, which, according to him, one would think, should be all internal; words in religion being of so little use, and external signs of none at all.

But when he adds, “They use not these *externals* as words to express their meaning,” what can he mean? *Symbolical rites* are not intended to express the *people’s* meaning to one another, as words do. The meaning they express, is what God has put upon them, and intends they should convey to *their minds* who use them: That is, they exhibit some great facts and truths proper to impress their minds, and draw their attention to the *peculiar obligations* they are under, to live according to the laws of reason, and that religion they profess; as will quickly be more fully shown. This is the use both *vulgar* and *non-vulgar* should make of them. Those who use them as words to express their meaning, abuse them.

BUT,

But, the vulgar, it seems, conceive there is no
 knows "not what, *intentional* *beliefs* in themselves. A
 strange conceit, it must be owned, that there
 should be *intentional* *beliefs* in the *externals* of reli-
 gion. But this is not the worst. They see
 "in such representations, as necessary, as the
 "things represented by them. Nay, by degrees
 "forgetting the reason of their institution, come
 "to idolize them; as the *Israelites* did the *brazen*
 "*Serpent*. And this, if it is to be believed,
 "the people have *always* done in *all* religions,
 "where such representations have been used."
 All this amounts to no more, than that such
 rites are liable to be abused. Must God appoint
 nothing in religion, therefore, but what man can-
 not abuse? Reason it self is liable to abuse. Must
 God therefore put out this light? If not, why
 may he not appoint some *internal* observances in
 religion, for *wise* and *good* ends, though liable
 to the same abuse? If their *meanings*, and the
 reasons of them are plainly set forth in their in-
 stitution, is it a reason why God must not enjoin
 them, that men may drop these out of their
 minds? Nay, should they idolize them, I can-
 not see, but for the same reason, he must have
 made *nor Sun*, *nor Moon*, nor the *Host* of *Hea-*
ven, because men have been too apt to idolize
 them. But that the *brazen Serpent*, idolized by the
Israelites, was a *symbolical* rite of their religion,
 to me appears not. Nor that the people *always*
 and in *all* religions, made idols of such symbols,
 where there were such institutions. It appears
 not to me that the *Israelites* made idols of any *sym-*
bolical rites of divine appointment. Though they
 made *symbolical* idols in the *golden* and *Ire-*
boam's calves.
 MAY

It must be owned, whether the great vulgar, or little, have too great a propensity to place *externals* in religion, instead of what is *internal and spiritual*, the means instead of the end. But God himself appoints no means, or none but what men cannot abuse. All that can be required in the case, is, that the plain intention of the institution be made known, and men warned against *subtleties*. This we shall see by and by, has been fully done in the case before us. This being done, if men will use their reason, and be upon their guard, such abuse will be avoided. If not, the light of reason would be no security against mischiefs as fatal in religion as *this*. Men are very apt to take up with a partial obedience to the law of *nature*, and make the performance of *one* duty, an excuse for the neglect of *others*. And this is as common an error as the former. Nay, what is there so good in it felt, that men may not abuse? *Religion, virtue, the love of one's country*, are all liable to abuse; and by artifice practising on weakness, have been made to destroy themselves. Is God to be blamed, therefore, that there are *just things* in the world? Or that *free Agents*, though folly and wickedness, can abuse them? I see not then, *but all the evil* in the world must be laid to his charge.

Nothing has no *subtendency* in themselves, but the quite contrary, it is no reason against them, that men may, nor that they are apt to abuse them. Nor is this a reason against God's appointing *symbolical rites* in religion. There may be wise and kind appointments, designed for, and in themselves fitted to promote the good of mankind. Sure such must be blameless in themselves,

themselves, and God not only *blameless*, but *merciful* in the institution. *And* such the *reasons* are. They are both *vows* of the christian profession. Who ever observes them, by so doing professes himself a *Disciple of Christ*, and solemnly engages himself to serve God, according to his *rules* and *institutions*. Such sacred and solemn *rites* of engagement, are much more *awful* in themselves, and apt to impress the mind with a *sense* of the obligations men are under, than their mere *owning* and *bearing* the christian name. 'Tis like taking an oath of *fidelity* to an earthly sovereign or state. And what now is imply'd in these engagements, but a binding themselves to the exercise of the most *real* and *rational* piety towards God, of *temperance*, *continence*, and *purity* of heart and life, in the conduct of themselves, and of the most *strict truth*, *exact justice*, and *extensive benevolence* towards others, even *all men*. Must not such solemn *rites*, intended and fitted to fasten deep in men's minds a *sense* of such obligations, be of *vast use*, and therefore *wise* and *kind* appointments of God?

Both of them are *memorials* of a *dying Saviour* pouring out his blood and life, not only in attestation of the truth of what he taught, but as an *atonement* for sin, and to conciliate divine favour for believing sinners. The most *convincing* and *astonishing* proof of God's love to his sinful creatures, and the most *unexampled* good will in the Son of God to his and his Father's enemies: How apt, how powerful a *confirmation* is here offer'd, to render sin *odious*, and give the sinner a *due sense* of his *heinous guilt* and *demerit*. To kindle up the *fear* of God, and

^b See this explained afterwards, page 473, &c.

settle it in the heart? To excite the most cordial, free, and disinterested love, not only to *their fellow-disciples*, but to all men? To inspire with exaltation of mind, and the greatest fervour in the cause of religion and virtue, patience under sufferings, resignation to the divine will, and contempt of death and danger, is the cause of God? And if, as *this author* observes, we are to love God, because he first loved us; in how much stronger a light is the love of God to us set, than in that he places it, when we consider our selves, not merely as creatures, but criminals; and yet beloved by him, and that at such a rate, that he gave his only begotten Son to redeem us? And leaving out all consideration of divine influence attending the religious observance of these rites, must not such considerations, naturally by them suggested, be powerful incentives to the love of God and men? The most devout love to God, and the most generous love and good will to men, to all men; not only those of the same household of faith, the wise, the virtuous, the good, the kind, but those who injure and persecute us, and pursue us with deadly hatred?

AND though one of these rites is once only to be used, and not repeated; the other is frequently to be observed. And must not solemn rites of divine appointment, enjoining and assisting men to attend to such considerations, render these more efficacious than occasional thoughts, when men are at leisure, or in humour for them? Surely these will be more overly, and less affecting, than when men in obedience to divine commands, and acting under the eye of their supreme Ruler, attend to these considerations. These rites therefore must appear wisely fitted to promote real piety and virtue, a strict regard to

all

all the laws of nature as well as the peculiar duties of Christianity, and therefore are gracious and merciful institutions. And does God encroach on his creatures, and spend his power, by enjoining things so much for the advancement of real religion, and therefore for the advantage of mankind? Is it not, in this author's phrase, to show the divine government thus to insinuate?

Fourthly, The gospel rites are only two, and for constant use no more than one; Baptism being to be administered but once. They are not numerous to clog and encumber religion, or call men's attention off from what is inward and real, and lead them into practices foreign to it. There is a merciful condescension in them to human frailty, an accommodation of the means of religion to men's low taste and imperfect frame, but with a due concern that religion does not degenerate into mere outward forms, and lifeless image. And in this respect, as he observes, Christian religion has the advantage of the Jewish: But when he adds, though it has some

P. 111

Page 108. YET even of the Jewish rites, though more numerous, a rational account might be given, no doubt, had we a perfect history of those times, and did we thoroughly know the circumstances of that people, and other nations. Thus we know, that they had long sojourned in Egypt, the seat and source of superstition in those days. They were surrounded with idolatrous nations. From these, as God's people, the worshippers of the true and living God, they were to be kept apart, till by their captivity and dispersion, their religion and rules of morality, together with their expectations of the Messiah, were to be communicated to the world.

To answer this end, their religion, so far as possible, was to be suited to those circumstances. As they had been long accustomed to the usage of the Egyptians, lived amidst

"rites as carnal as theirs." I should apprehend him under a mistake: For, admitting they had some rites prefiguring things to come in the *evangelical times*, the rationale of them was not then so plain, nor their spiritual meaning and purpose so well known. For which reason, their ordinances must have been less spiritual in their use and tendency, than *Christian Rites*, whatever they are in themselves.

Fifthly, THE rites of Christianity are such, as may be observed in all times and places, how extensively soever this religion be spread; nor can any variation of circumstances make a change in the general institution necessary. In what country or climate may not *Baptism* be administered? In what country may not *Bread and Wine* be apply'd to the sacred purposes of the other *Sacrament*? Or say, some countries may not afford *Wine*, nor some constitutions allow of its use, what harm is there

there, had but too strong propensions to idolatry themselves, had their religion been wholly void of ceremony they had been more liable to seduction. Ceremonies of divine appointment, accommodated to this taste, would help to secure them from these temptations.

ON the the other hand, it was necessary that they should have rites differing from those of their idolatrous neighbours, and some in a sort of opposition to theirs. Otherwise similitude of rites might have been a powerful temptation to the idolatry it self. And this *Maimonides* tells us, was the view of them all. Many were plainly appointed for this end.

MANY of their rites were fitted to them as a theocracy, a civil Government, in which God was their king, and they his subjects; of which this author himself speaks, (p. 99.) but is greatly out, as has been made appear, when he would insinuate, that it was their free election of God to be their king, which alone empowered him to enjoin positive rites in their religion. But if we cannot give a reason for all their religious institutions, God, no doubt, had reasons for them, and those good and weighty ones.

there in using any other potable liquid in its stead? "The founder of the religion needs not interpose for this change; eating and drinking in remembrance of Christ, is the thing enjoined: And though the fruit of the Vine was in the cup, which Jesus distributed, yet is it observable, that in every place where the institution is recorded, the cup only is mentioned; the liquor in it is not specified: "He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying; Drink ye all of it, for this is my Blood of the New Testament. And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank of it; and he said, This is my Blood of the New Testament. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this and divide it among your selves. Thus Paul speaks of the institution, and immediately after tells the Corinthians, As often as ye eat this Bread, and drink this Cup, ye shew forth the Lord's death. The liquid in the Cup being therefore never specified, can be of no importance. And in other respects, I see not but in all times and places, this religious rite may be observed, to the purpose for which it was instituted. There is no time nor place, wherein Christians will not be under an obligation to remember a dying Saviour; nor wherein such remembrance, as is by this rite enjoined, and in the religious use of it, renewed and assisted, will not be of advantage to all the purposes of the christian life.

Sixthly, It is every where declared in the Gospel, on proper occasions, that these rites are by themselves of no value, nor required for their own sakes, but only in subserviency to religion or morality, in

17. ^h 1 Cor. xi. 25, 26. ^e Matt. xvi. 27, 28. ^f Mark xiv. 23, 24. ^g Luke xxii.

its most extensive and exalted sense. To which, therefore, they must be subordinate, and give way when circumstances require. We are not only told, in general, that in Christ Jesus (or christian religion) neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature; and as many as walk by this rule, Peace be upon them: Which is elsewhere exprest thus; *but faith which worketh by love*: And again, *but keeping the commandments of God*: Plainly implying, that neither this nor that ceremony, but a change of internal dispositions, that faith which is the great instrument of the christian life, shewing its power in works of love to God and man; and particularly, by keeping the commands of God, is what only intitles to divine favour. But in particular, Baptism, where it is said to save us, is said to be the *answer of a good conscience*, not putting away the filth of the flesh. And as to the other Sacrament, Paul tells the Corinthians, when they came together not for the purposes for which it was instituted, this was *not to eat the Lord's Supper*: Nay, that such abuse was likely to provoke God, and bring down his judgments on them. And it is in this sense, that the letter is said to kill, a phrase so frequently occurring in our author, and borrowed from the *apostle*: When the rite is observed according to the letter, men stick in the outside, without pursuing it into its spiritual meaning and intention. This the Jews were too prone to do. And because their religion abounded more with rituals, the apostle calls it the letter, in opposition to the Spirit; and says of it, that *it kills*: Whereas the Spirit, or New Testament dispensation, *giveth life*, is fitted

Gal. vi. 15, 16. ^k Ch. v. 6. ^l 1 Cor. v. 11, 19.
^m 1 Pet. iii. 21. ⁿ 1 Cor. xi. 26, &c. ^o 2 Cor. iii. 6.

to ingenerate living and inward religion; which rituals, if men stick in them, are apt to choke and smother. And to this purpose he tells us, *He is not a Jew, who is one outwardly; nor is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, not in the letter, but in the Spirit; whose praise is not of men, but of God.* In which expressions he plainly intimates, both to *Jews* and *Christians*, that the observation of the outward rite, without regard to the spiritual intention of it, and pursuing it into its genuine purposes, is of no significance. It is not the external visible badge that makes a man a *Christian*, but the genuine Spirit of true religion, or sound religion reigning in the heart, that God will accept and commend.

So that all due care is taken, that these two rites should have no more stress laid on them than is fit; but should be regarded and observed as means of religion, and no farther as parts of it, than such means bearing the stamp of divine authority, and observed out of obedience to his commands, may be so.

Seventhly, It seems plain to me, that in the sacred writings, care is taken to restrain men from multiplying such rites, or making any addition to them. The religion and worship of *Christians*, is, by our Saviour himself, declared to be spiritual;

P 3

^P Rom. ii. 28, 29.

NAY, even under the Jewish Dispensation, where rites did more abound, yet many passages occur, in which their subordination to the natural duties founded on reason, is not only hinted, but plainly exprest; and where regard to them is made of no account, nay, represented as *useful* to God, if separated from the more important duties. Isa. i. 11—18. Ch. lxvii. 2, 3, 4. Jer. vi. 20. Ch. vii. 21, 22, 23. Amos v. 21—25. Micah vi. 6, 7, 8, &c.

and that as opposed to the Jewish. *They who worship God, who is a Spirit, must worship him in Spirit and in truth; with inward, real worship, not the mere outward shadows of it, which that of Jews comparatively was, limited to places, times, and abounding in externals; whereas it is spiritual worship and worshippers God seeks; and these only are genuine and true.* He also tells the Pharisees, who were much for an outside shew of religion, that they did worship God in vain, whilst they taught for doctrine, the commands of men; or, as it may be rendered, the doctrines, the commands of men; speaking of the Jewish washings. And what was blameable in Pharisees, and rendered their worship vain, can never be blameless in christians; and his disciples can never suppose him to condemn Pharisees for what is faultless in Christians; and allow them to teach the doctrine, the commandments of men, when Pharisees, for so doing, are by him declared in vain to worship God.

THE Apostle bids christians stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free, and not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage; with particular regard to circumcision, to which the Judaizers would have had the Gentile christians submit. And if institutions originally divine, were a yoke of bondage, from which Christ has freed his disciples; and his apostle requires them to stand fast in this liberty; they are much more freed by him from every yoke of bondage imposed by men, and under equal obligation, at least, to stand fast in this liberty. What God has

John. iv. 23, 24. *But Matt. xv. 9.*
Did agoriles did agoriles eladunja indet
 Gal. v. 1.

left indifferent, men can have no power, by imposing, to make necessary. And it were very odd, indeed, when himself has been *suspending* in positives, not to encumber religion, distract men's minds, and call them off by outward *show*, from the life, spirit and substance of religion, to suppose he has left men at liberty, to multiply such *ad libitum*; or, which is in effect the same, as far as they shall judge requisite to order and decency, and to stir up the dull mind of man to attention and devotion. Against such superstition, and indeed tyranny, this author may declaim as much as he pleases, and make such positives as hateful as he can. In men this is a stretch of power. The apostle seems directly to have prohibited all imposition of what God has left indifferent, requiring that every man, in things of this kind, have a full persuasion in his own mind, e'er he practise, and declaring what is not of faith (or done with such full persuasion that it ought, or at least may be done) is sin. At least, where doubt is, there imposition of such things is plainly forbidden.

Lastly, Positive rites, thus instituted by God himself, and thus secured from misapprehension and abuse, are a much better preservative from superstition, and all other mischiefs, than if men were left (as this author would have them) to invent and use such as to them shall seem meet. If the purpose of God in these institutions be attended to, there is no danger of superstition from them; they are means well fitted in themselves, and much more with the divine blessing accompanying them, to promote sincere repentance for sin, faith in a redeemer, piety and devotion towards God; to enflame brotherly love, and inspire with

universal benevolence to mankind. If any means of this sort are fit to be applied to these ends, and promote these ends, surely it is fit divine wisdom should prescribe them. If mankind are left at liberty, to invent such rites themselves, they are likely not only to multiply them needlessly, being naturally given to superstition, but to quarrel endlessly about them: Each person and party would be superstitiously fond of its own, if not forward to impose them on others. Infinite wisdom is much more fit to settle this matter, than weak men, too commonly guided by mere fancy. As the matter is settled by him, yet men have been presumptuous enough to add rites of their own invention, and corrupt and abuse his. Had they not done much worse, had they been left at full liberty?

BESIDES, the authority of the supreme ruler, if regarded, is more likely to secure their observance; and this authority is of so much importance, even towards the obligations of natural religion, that to have it inculcated on men must be of great use; for which reason, positive institutions, deriving from it all their obliging power, cannot but be of great advantage; especially when few and plain, without gaudy shew and pomp, and fitted to subserve the purposes of true and genuine religion and morality, and guarded from misinterpretation and abuse, and human additions, to the incumbrance of religion; as christian rites appear, from what has been said, to be.

THESE observations carry in them an answer to every thing alledged by this author against positive institutions in religion. But that he may not complain of our evading the force of his arguments, I shall particularly go over every thing

thing of moment he has to say in prejudice to such institutions. All may be reduced under two heads.

First, That they being inconsistent with the perfections of God, and rules of his government.

Secondly, The mischief they do to mankind.

First, He would persuade us, they are inconsistent with the rules of divine government, and perfections of the divine nature.

1st. With the rules of divine government.

Such institutions, says he, being not founded on the eternal reasons of things, but in their own nature indifferent, can never become the matter of a divine command.

Why so? — Because it is breaking in upon the rule of divine conduct. How does he know? Has he a thorough understanding of the rules of divine conduct? But he has a reason, it seems, for what he says. “If there be no reason why a thing should be done at all, or why not one way as well as another, or why men should not vary means, as they judge them conducive to their ends; why should he, who never acts unnecessarily, but always wisely, interpose? But if there be no antecedent reason, why a thing should be done at all, or why one way rather than another, surely to the creature, God’s requiring it is a sufficient reason for doing it, and doing it in the way required. And he may have good reason for interposing with his authority, though not appearing to us. It is not a little presumptuous to insist upon it, that God should do or enjoin nothing but what man sees

an antecedent reason for, and this a necessary one too.

And why must "Men be left to vary means just as they judge conducive to their ends?"

Why may not the supreme ruler, in matters of religion, prescribe the means as well as end?

Especially means not having necessary connexion with the end, as religious rites have not. Means

in necessary connexion with their end are not matters of liberty. They are required toge-

ther with the end, nor may men vary them. Means in no such connexion, without a divine

warrant, man has, in this case, no right to use, for a reason just before given. No being but

God, has power to make a thing in its own nature indifferent, pass out of that state of in-

difference, by applying it to a sacred use, nor therefore to institute a religious rite. But when

the Author and Lord of nature, for wise and good ends, thinks fit to make this change in

things, is it dutiful for any man to tell him, he stretches his power, and trespasses on the

rule of his conduct? That is, it seems, this man's reason and wisdom. Sure, it becomes

God, and him only, to judge and determine what shall be such means of religion, and how

far, and in what manner, they shall be conducive to their ends.

But, "Whatever is unreasonable for God to do, is contrary, he says, to the eternal

law of his nature." And such, if he mistakes not, is the enjoining positives in religion. But why so?

"Because it is depriving men of that liberty which was granted them

by the law of nature." But admitting this, why must this liberty, at no time, and for no

reason

reason whatever, be abridged? "Those reasons, it seems, which oblige God to command good and forbid evil, must wholly cease with regard to an indifferent subject, which is neither." That is, a thing that is neither naturally good or evil, cannot be commanded or forbidden as such. A self-evident proposition. But can God command or forbid nothing but what is thus naturally good or evil? Nothing but what he is obliged to command or forbid? Then, it seems, he has no commanding power properly free; he is obliged to require what is good, and to forbid what is evil; and if this author judges right, neither to command nor forbid what is indifferent; "The same reason which obliges him to interpose in things good and evil, forbidding him to do so in things indifferent." He must be therefore destitute of all free exercise of his power at all. But why is this at all a natural supposition? If there be no reason in the nature of things for their being commanded or forbidden, yet may there be no reason besides for which God should command or forbid them? And is not he a fit judge, whether there be a fit reason for thus interposing or no?

BUT, "Men's happiness depends on their liberty in such things." But if the abridgment of their liberty is with a view to the promoting their happiness, and the advantage accruing be greater than the loss sustained, they are gainers on the balance, and no harm is done; and God is good to them, in changing, so far, the nature of indifferents. Nay, if it be for the good of mankind to observe the law of nature, or act according to the fitness of things; and if it be of any use

towards this observance, that men should be sensible divine authority binds this upon them, then the *deeper sense* they have of this authority, the *greater force* must they feel in this obligation. If therefore *divine wisdom* thinks fit to bind any thing on mankind, by his *mere authority*, to impress them the *deeper* with the sense of it, and make them, at the same time, *sensible*, how much they are obliged to him, for making the *main* of their duty that only which has a natural tendency to their good; this exercise of his *prerogative* is more for their *advantage* than their liberty in indifferent things could be. So that though all the laws of God were allowed to have a *sole regard* to man's happiness, such *positive* commands, as having this manifest tendency, may be the matter of his laws; and that even in the most *perfect state* of human nature, and much more in the present *degenerate state* in which mankind are.

2dly. To prove this point he tells us, "It is certain, such a Being as God, would give no rules to his creatures, but to oblige them to act for their common good." This is far from being certain, as he expresses it, even supposing the common good includes that of every individual. The honour of God, and his right, must never be left out; the good of both governor and governed being the end of all government, both human and divine. But he goes on, — "If then an action is for their (common) good, is not that an infallible test of its being approved of God? If it tends to their hurt, is not that as certain a test of its being disapproved by him? But if it neither tends to that (common) good

“good or hurt, does not that sufficiently shew,
“that it is neither approved or disapproved of
“him.” If instead of *their* common good, he
had said *the* common good, viz. both of go-
vernor and governed, and supposing him to
mean what is really for the common good or
prejudice, and not what every one, and even
he himself, may think so, there had been less
room for contradicting him; And not merely,
what is antecedently for the common good, and
so necessarily, that it must make a part of the
law of reason considered as a means or end.
For what has not this antecedent good in it,
may yet have such a fitness to promote the
ends of religion, as by a divine command, if
infinite wisdom thinks fit, to be made such a
means, and as such bound on mankind.

BUT admitting what he says for true, it is
very hard that the common parent of mankind,
and their sovereign Ruler, may not be allowed
to judge what in all circumstances, is for the
common good of his subjects, unless his judgment
accords with theirs. Whose, I pray? This au-
thor? Or every man's? If every man's, is this a
natural and reasonable limitation of divine
power? Must God require nothing but what
every man can see is for the common good?
And why not every man as well as this au-
thor? Because his judgment is superior to theirs?
One would think, for the same reason, the
superior judgment of infinite wisdom, should be
a better guide to the supreme Ruler than his.
It is hard that he must enjoin nothing but
what meets with his approbation.

I CANNOT see, but though the action of
washing, for instance, antecedently to his com-
mand, be neither approved nor disapproved by
him,

him, yet having appointed such an action to an *only use*, and annexed such *other actions* to it, whilst in use, as have a direct tendency to the good of mankind, he must approve the action, when done in the manner prescribed, and must disapprove the neglect or faulty performance; for though the action, strip of all circumstances, be neither good nor evil, yet to do it out of obedience to God is *morally good*; and to neglect to do it, or do it wrong, out of disobedience, is *morally evil*, unless God's authority stands for *nothing*; and then I cannot see, how it can oblige to observe the law of nature. And though men, where he does not interpose, are bound by the *natural law*, it is very unnatural to suppose he is tied up from interposing on any occasions which to him seem proper; and who shall presume to say no such occasions can ever be? Nay, in the present *corrupt state* of mankind, there are many men whose reason is no way inferior to this *author's*, who can see a great propriety in the divine interposure on this occasion, and God's instituting the *christian rites* as *subsidiary means* for the better observing the law of nature.

When he adds, as a farther reason for what he had said, "Since it is as inconsistent with God's goodness to punish men for not doing an indifferent thing, as with his wisdom to reward them for doing it;" He seems to make God's approbation and disapprobation equivalent with his rewarding and punishing; but is much mistaken when he supposes God to reward or punish a *morally indifferent thing*; for in all its circumstances it is not *such*. It is not the doing or not doing an indifferent thing which he

he rewards or punishes, but obedience or disobedience to his command, which are certainly *one good, and the other evil*.

But "*human legislators*, he says, "cannot deprive subjects of their liberty, but must protect them in doing what *they see fit*, where *no one is injured*. Herein the *whole* of human liberty consists, the contrary being a state of mere *vassalage*. And men are more or less miserable, as they are more or less deprived of this liberty, especially in matters of mere religion, wherein they ought to be most free." This talk looks to me very puzzled. What are we here to understand by *human liberty*, which, he says, wholly consists in *men acting as they please, where no one is injured*, the contrary to which is a state of *vassalage*, men being more or less miserable, as they are hindered in so doing, more or less? Are we to understand it of their *natural liberty* from command and controul? They are bound to do what is *naturally good*, and to refrain what is *naturally evil*, and so can only use their pleasure, and either do or forbear as *they like*, in what is *naturally neither*. And for *human legislators* to take away this liberty, is to make them so far miserable; and when no one is injured by it, it is *out of their power* to deprive them of this liberty.

AND what are we to understand by "*mere religion*;" in which men ought to be most free, that is, at liberty to act as they please, so no one be injured? Sometimes the *whole* of religion, with him, is the *law of nature*, and this *patriotism*. Ought men to be most free here, or most at liberty, either to do or forbear?

bear? And have *human legislators* nothing to do to deprive men of this liberty, nor enjoin their subjects to promote the *common good*? It is to be hoped, this is not his meaning. And yet, if this be the *whole* of religion, what besides can be *mere religion*, in which mankind are to be *most free*? He is here, I own, out of my reach. Nor can I guess what he means, unless it be, that mens *religious sentiments*, as long as neither *particular persons*, or *the publick*, receive damage from them, should not be controul'd by the *civil power*. In this I have no dispute with him. The *civil magistrate* is, in *the apostles language*, an *human ordinance* or *creature*; he is a *trustee* for the community. Mens *consciences* are not to be delivered up to him in trust, and cannot be. Things must be judged of by every man, as they appear to his *own mind*, not as they appear to *that* of another. Nor can men judge by *another's judgment*, any more than they can see with *another's eyes*. In judging for himself, so far as is consistent with *others good*, and the *publick weal*, no man in matters of religion is to be controul'd by human legislators. But if this be all he means, how little it is to *his purpose* will quickly appear.

AND yet *human legislators* may, in many cases, not only enter on *private property*, but otherwise abridge persons in liberties allowed by the *law of nature*, even where many of their subjects *see not* that this is for the *publick good*? Is no man bound to pay a *tax*, and yield up some of his private property, which, by the *law of nature*, he may use at pleasure,

^a 1 Pet. ii. 13.

^b *Arbiterium* 21015.

to no one be hurt by it, till he sees this is for the good of the publick? How much mischief would this do in society? And if *earthly rulers* may abridge the *natural* liberty of their subjects, where it appears to *them* for the publick good, though the subjects see not how, sure the *supreme ruler* cannot be without this power.

BUT *this author* is strangely out, in comparing the rights of *earthly rulers* with those of the *supreme ruler*, unless he supposes the power of both to be equally from the people, and that God is king over mankind only by their constitution or consent. But his authority is underived; it is in and from himself, and all power else is from him. Liberties he has freely given, and is under no obligation to continue; he may at pleasure wholly refrain or curtail. But when he makes a matter of liberty to become a duty, for his creatures good, in gracious condescension to their weakness, and to promote their religious weal, this is an act of great kindness in him, and his will should be complied with, and that with readiness and pleasure. To be abridged of liberty for this purpose is a privilege; how then should he make men miserable? And if this be a state of vassalage, such vassals to the *supreme Ruler* all his reasonable creatures are, and ought to be.

WHEN he talks, that in matters of mere religion men ought to be most free; if the sense I have before given be his sense, I despair of ever seeing this made out. If conscience be not under the proper controul of *earthly rulers*, is it not under the government of God? Is the man at liberty to do as he pleases, whether it

be according to God's will, or against it? Or by matters of mere religion are we to understand the matters of divine worship, and this not as natural, and founded in reason, but as implying somewhat positive? Must men act just as they please in these matters? And, has God no power to prescribe to them, nor constrain them in the exercise of their pleasure? Sure, if any thing deserves and requires his regard and concern, the matters of his worship peculiarly fall under his care. Leaving men at liberty in these matters, as has been shewn, is opening a door to superstition, and other gross corruptions in his worship. And to suppose men most at liberty in these matters, is to license the most extravagant freaks of wanton fancy, and introduce all the follies of men into the worship of God.

But it is demonstrable, he says, from our natural notions of God, that he will require nothing from his creatures but what is for their good (I am not sure this can be demonstrated) and that matters which have no such tendency, must have another nature different from the divine, on which such a building must be built. If his telling us a thing is demonstrable from natural notions will pass for demonstration, we shall meet with abundance of demonstrations in him. But admitting this, the evangelical rites having manifestly such a tendency, are not hay nor stubble, but may be built on the divine nature. And if every thing of this sort, is, as he says, a superstructure on the law of nature, and belonging to it, or what the reason and nature of things plainly point out to us;

such institutions belong to the natural law. And then, in appointing such rites, the great ruler of the world passes not the bounds of his power. And if it be demonstrable, that God can require nothing but what is for his creatures good, one would think it might be left to him to judge what is for such good. And it is much more natural and becoming to conclude, from his appointment, that such institutions are for his creatures good, than to argue, that in their own nature they are neither good nor evil, therefore God cannot appoint them; since he has it in his power as well to make them turn to the advantage of his creatures, as if they were naturally good.

Secondly, He would insinuate, that positive rites in religion would prove God mutable. If, "says he", there are new things in religion, not moral, must not this suppose a change of mind in God? Why this limitation to things not moral? Would not new things in religion, though moral, equally suppose such change? Must not his mind be as different, from what once it was? But this really argues no more change of mind in God, than the change of the moon, or the seasons, or any other change. God, without any change in himself, makes various changes in nature and human affairs. Must every thing in nature remain invariably in the same state, or the author of nature be changeable? Is this argument, or manifest mistake? And why are changes in the moral world arguments of mutability in God, more than changes in the natural world? Or why, as circumstances vary, may

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not

not God's conduct towards his creatures vary without any change in himself? Does not himself say, "That to alter one's conduct as circumstances alter, is not only an act of great prudence and judgment, but consistent with the greatest steadiness?" Why may not God therefore be steady and unchangeable, in upon a variation in the state of mankind he enjoins some positive rites, though at origine he required no such observances? But how will he prove, that no such observances were required in the first state of man? If this be not taken for granted there is nothing in his argument; for if rituals had place in divine worship at origine, there was no change of mind in God, though some rituals, proper for one state of man, were changed for others more proper for a different. This should not have been taken for granted. All appearances in the history of man are against him. No time can be assigned, wherein men did not observe rites. It is begging the question to suppose, that these were all originally the effect of superstition and mere fancy. When he says, "Does not this infer a change of mind in God?" And where then must we stop? Asking a question proves nothing, and he should have stop'd till he had an answer. But to go on with him, "If God be changeable, must he not be infinitely so? May he not command some things positive to day, and others to morrow, some in one place, and others in another?" What is this but impertinence? Changeableness in common account is an imperfection, this can-

not be the attribute of an infinite and infinitely perfect Being. Whence then his talk of God's being infinitely changeable? But what if he did enjoin some positive rites at one time and place, and others at different ones? How does this prove him changeable, more than sun-shine at one place and rain at another, peace in one place and war in another, spring him changeable? Without any change in himself, he may, as the circumstances of men vary, appoint different rites in different times and places, if he may appoint any at all; which, I hope, has been made fully appear.

No, says he, to suppose God can appoint positive rites is an inconsistency. How so? Why, "to suppose that God, by the law of nature, leaves men at liberty in indifferent matters, and yet by a positive law restrains this liberty, in some parts and ages of the world, is to suppose God determines one way by mediate, and another by immediate revelation, both laws subsisting at once?" To me this very talk is inconsistent; for if God restrains by a posterior law, what liberty he had granted by a former, surely that grant must in *tantum* be repealed. Both laws do not therefore, in his language, subsist at once. The same persons, at the same time, are not at once at liberty, and under restraint, in which only there is inconsistency. Two laws, making different determinations, may subsist at once, whilst the different determinations are for different persons, times, and places.

And this author is too assuming; when he supposes men, by the law of nature, left at such

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full

full and invariable liberty in indifferent matters. Indeed, whilst God interposes not, they are at liberty; but to suppose themselves exempt by the law of nature from divine restraint in matters left by that indifferent, is a supposition not founded in the nature and reason of things. God may, when he sees good, revoke liberties he has freely granted, but is not bound to continue; without breaking in upon any rule of conduct, by which he is obliged to act, much less any made known for such to his creatures.

Thirdly, Such positive rites are, in his reckoning, an impeachment of divine wisdom, and that on more accounts than one.

First. THEY are things of no innate worth or excellency. "Things of no value in themselves," says "he," can be no motives to an all-wise Being, "to clog our happiness with such needless observances." Put the case this is true, what then? Therefore positive rites, in themselves are of no value; and needless observances cannot be required by infinite wisdom. "And to suppose "our future happiness, or any part of it, depends "on our paying regard to such commands," is to "derogate from divine wisdom," and the motives we have to love and honour him.

This argument is wholly built on a supposition, that these rites are enjoined for their own sakes; upon which supposition they may be as worthless, useless, and needless, as he would represent them. But by circumstances attending their use, they may be made to serve excellent purposes, and have a tendency to promote real religion; and as acts of obedience to a divine command may be needful, and instances of moral

ral duty. Nor are they, in this view, ~~helps~~ to our happiness, but excellent helps towards it. And though our happiness may not be wisely made to depend on the ceremony of washing, for instance: yet if God, for wise and good ends, thinks fit to enjoin such a ceremony, it may be made to depend on obedience to the divine command, though there were no reason but the divine pleasure for the institution: and much more, when this is so evidently designed for ~~the~~ good. All our motives to love and honour God remain in full force, this notwithstanding. Nor are all our motives to love and honour God founded on his *benignity* to us: His *own* perfections, and underived and unlimited power, are as rational motives to love and honour him, and even more so, because *less* selfish; as the greater good of the publick is a rational motive why we should prefer it, in some instances, to *our own*.

AND, "Should all the *dictates* of infinite wisdom, as he says, carry their *own* evidence on them, and by their innate worth be discoverable or discernible to all men; these *positive* *rites* will carry evident marks of divine wisdom, and goodness too, to all who attend to their occasion and design." Yet it is very wrong in him to assert, that all the *dictates* of divine wisdom must carry such evidence. There are a thousand, ten thousand instances of *his* wisdom, in nature and providence, that lie out of the reach of human discernment and discovery. Nor is this strange, when the *wisest* of men carry on their designs in ways not obvious to, nor easily discoverable by *common* minds. And it is unnatural to suppose, that all the *measures* of divine

conduct must approve themselves to every understanding, and be open and obvious to the most vulgar eye, or even that of so deep a philosopher as our author. But, *Positively* institutions impeach divine wisdom, in his account, because they render his laws disagreeable to each other, not all of a piece. "If God's laws, says he", are all of a piece, "must they not be all built on the eternal reason of things? If that be sufficient reason to determine him in one case, must it not be so in all?" And yet this reason, when it comes to be explained, is nothing but the good of mankind. No other action, by his eternal reason of things, can be required of God himself, but what antecedently to his commands has manifest and necessary connexion with this good. But I am mistaken, if it has not been made appear, that it is very consistent with the reason of things, that authority should sometimes be exercised by the independent and unlimited ruler of the world, that has no other reason but a righteous claim of such power, and the impressing his subjects with a due sense of it; and in this case, what determines God to command may be the eternal reason of things, though not in his sense. A Being infinitely wise can make no determinations but what are wise, and therefore founded in reason; but man's reason and wisdom are not to be made the measure of his. But in his sense of the eternal reasons of things he should not have taken it for granted, that God's laws must be all of a piece, but have proved it; and not have taken it for proof to ask, "If the eternal reason of things be sufficient to determine God in one case, must it not be so in all?"

"so in all?" Which in other words, is, If God was determined, by regard to the good of mankind, to make his natural law to consist of duties founded only in nature, must he not be determined by the same consideration to make all his laws of the same sort? And will the asking this question prove his point, and shew it to be in connexion with self-evident notions? We have abundance of such proofs in this work.

BUT, says he, "If God's works shew infinite wisdom, there is no reason but his laws should do the same." Doubtless they do, What then? why then, "they must be moral laws, for these alone can speak his wisdom as plainly as his works do." Here we have, as usual, much affirmation and little argument? Do all God's works shew his wisdom, and plainly speak it out to mankind? Can they discern an antecedent reason for them, and how they are necessary, or so much as subservient to the good of the universe? They may, indeed, plainly see, that many of them have this tendency, and hence may very reasonably conclude others have a like tendency, though they see not how; and from what they do see, have all the reason in the world to conclude, the maker of the world is a good and kind being. Suppose then, that some of God's laws have not manifestly so necessary a tendency to the good of mankind as others, whilst the body of his laws have a plain and necessary connexion with their happiness, will not this equally prove, that the ruler of mankind is a wise and kind governor? And is it not as reasonable to conclude from hence, that those laws which do not appear in such evident connexion

nexion with human happiness, have yet a like tendency? And may not the wisdom of God, this notwithstanding, be as conspicuous in the body of his laws, as in his works, taken in the aggregate: seeing his wisdom, in fitting these to their ends (the good of the universe, suppose) nor does nor can equally appear to all, or indeed to any man? Why may we not in one case, as well as the other, conclude from what we do know, that what we do not, is yet an effect and evidence of the same wisdom?

3dly. THE making such rites perpetual and immutable, *he would have us believe, is inconsistent with divine wisdom, because not agreeable to the natural state of things.* These must be considered only as means of religion. Now, "Means," says he, being variable as circumstances "vary, to imagine such prescribed by the Gospel, is to make things dependent on circumstances independent; things proper under some circumstances necessary under all: Nay, means immutable and ends mutable: And that these are to continue the same, though by change of circumstances they become pre-judicial, nay destructive to the end for which they were ordained; when as the more necessary the end, the more reason is there for men to be left at liberty in the vast variety of changing circumstances, to consider what means are proper for the end: seeing these are only valuable as they are more or less subservient to it. When God does not interpose, human discretion is chiefly ordained to make alterations, as the nature of things requires." This talk, I own, I cannot thoroughly understand, nor well see what he drives at. Another passage,

passage may help, perhaps, to clear his meaning. "If we consider the infinite variety of circumstances, the different manners and customs prevailing in different places, the prejudices of the weak, ignorant, and superstitious, and the design of ambitious men; there is nothing of a mutable nature, but, if once immutably fixed of God, must some time or other become prejudicial to the end designed, especially in a religion to be extended over the whole world, and last to the end of it."

ALL this talk, if it be against the *rules* of the Gospel, has been already obviated. They are, indeed, only means of religion: not required for their own sakes, nor so immutably fixed, but if their observance interfere with any natural duty, they are to be omitted. Should baptism, for instance, endanger life; should any have such aversion to *water*, that, without sickness, they could not bear its sight or smell; should either sacraments be so corrupted and depraved, as by superstitious additions to destroy their end, their use is to be forborn. In such cases that rule should take place, *I will have mercy and not sacrifice*: Where both can't be observed, natural duties are to be done, and rituals omitted. This is the voice both of nature and revelation.

BUT, allowance being made for such cases, I cannot see why the evangelical rites may not be fixed of God "in a religion to extend through all the world, and last to the end of it;" since they may be observed in all places, and in all ages, for the ends for which they

^p Page 95. Vide Observ.

^q Vide Page 210. supra.

they were first appointed. If it happens that they are used for *other* ends and purposes, this is not *according* to the institution. By fixing the institution God has not fixed the *abuse*, nor made one unalterable by making the other so. This abuse may be rectified by *recourse* to the *gospel*, as other superstitions, by recourse to the *law of reason*. Nor can I understand how religion should be made *mutable*, by making the *rite perpetual*, unless by its being made so, a supervening abuse become *perpetual* too; for the *rite* it self must, at all times, be *subservient* to the unchangeable purpose of religion, according to its institution: Let the corruption and abuse be *removed*, and they will still answer their first design. As far as their observance depends on circumstances they are not *independent*.

SHOULD the *prejudices* of the weak and superstitious, and *designs* of ambitious men, corrupt such institutions, they would more likely corrupt those of *human invention*. And I am far from thinking with him, if this be indeed what he means, "That men are at liberty to appoint or alter such means as they judge changing circumstances may require," that the settling or changing them, seem to me to be the *divine prerogative*. "The more necessary the end, the less reason, there seems to me, for mens being at liberty in such matters." Nor does *human discretion* seem at all *ordained*, to make alterations as human wisdom may judge the nature of things require. Men have always multiplied rites *unnecessarily*, to the encumbrance and corruption of religion, and eating out its *heart* and *substance*. This, as he observes, is the ordinary effect of *superstition*,
and

and that the great foible of mankind. Is it not fit such an humour should be bounded? And can it be bounded, if mankind are supposed to have this boundless liberty? And who should bound it, but God himself? If he interposes and institutes such rites, these we may be sure are wise and fit. We can have no such assurance of those devised by men; and his interposures, one would think, should restrain men from meddling. If more or other rites would have been more serviceable to religion, he could not be ignorant of this, and would have appointed them, as well as those instituted by him. More than these must be perfectly needless. Christian worship looks best like *itself*, and most suitable to its ends, when simple, plain, and void of pomp. Spiritual worship and worshippers are what God requires and seeks. And when none other rites are introduced than God has appointed, christian worship will, in all nations, have the same face and appearance. They have no dependance on the customs, usages or manners, of particular countries, and so are fitted to a religion that was to extend through the world. There is a condescension in them to the weakness of mankind, and a restraint at the same time laid on their superstitious foibles. So that, in truth, God's interposures with such rites, is so far from doing the mischief he suggests, that it is a proper step to prevent it; so far from being a reproach to his wisdom, that the instituting such rites is a great instance of his wisdom and goodness too.

4thly, He would persuade us, such institutions are inconsistent with divine wisdom, because they derogate from the perfection of the natural law. The

"law of nature, says he, is either a *perfect* or im-
 "perfect law. If the *first*, it is capable of no
 "addition: If the *last*, doth it not argue want
 "of wisdom in the law-giver, in first enacting
 "such an imperfect law, and letting it con-
 "tinue such for many ages, and then making
 "it absolutely perfect, by the addition of mere-
 "ly *positive* and *arbitrary* precepts?" This has
 been fully obviated in what has been said be-
 fore, concerning the *perfection* of the law of na-
 ture: nor needs a farther reply. But, suppose
 the law of nature *perfect*, what then? It can
 have no addition. What means this? If the
 law of nature be so absolutely perfect, as to com-
 prehend every duty resulting from the nature
 and reason of things, no farther duty of this sort
 can be added to it. But will it hence follow,
 that God can require no other duty, by another
 law? It has been shewn very agreeable to the
 reason and nature of things, that God's autho-
 rity should be owned and submitted to, in any
 instance wherein he shall signify his pleasure to
 this purpose. The law of nature then, must bind
 obedience to such command. And the obser-
 vance of *positive institutions* of his, is but obe-
 dience to the law of nature, though this is not
 to be paid till his pleasure is known. And such
positive institutions, even from the first formation
 of man, had been binding on him by the law
 of nature, supposing them appointed of God.
 The contrary to which, as has been observed,
 he can never prove. And being allowed, all his
 talk, about the *imperfection* of the law of nature
 for ages, and the making it perfect by *arbitrary*
precepts, falls at once.

OK, suppose the law of nature, without such positive rites, to have been perfectly fitted for the first estate of man, yet from a change in his state and circumstances, such, to infinite wisdom, might appear requisite, as means to promote a regard to this *very law*. It is no derogation to the perfection of *this law*, that those governed by it, through their own *freedom* and *faults*, became too imperfect to pay a due obedience to it. And for God in this case to interpose, and enjoin *positive rites*, as subsidiary to the performance of natural duty, is at once an instance both of governing wisdom and goodness. It is not to make the law of nature perfect, that these additional precepts were given, but to assist *imperfect* man in rendering a more general and hearty obedience to it. His talk of *arbitrary* precepts, will after fall under consideration.

Fourthly, He would persuade us, that God may as well deceive us, as impose *positive commands* on us. If God, says he, may impose *arbitrary commands*, why may he not deceive us? "Tell us one thing, and act the contrary? As he is infinitely happy, he can have no motive to deceive us. Will not this reason equally hinder him from burdening us with *arbitrary commands*? It should seem, of the two, less absurd, that God should deceive men for *their good*, than impose arbitrary things on them for *their hurt*, by annexing severe penalties on non-observance. — I see no manner of connexion between God's giving *positive commands*, which is what he means by *arbitrary* ones, and his *deceiving* us; or telling us one thing, and acting the

the contrary. If his giving such commands implies no such thing: Whence then came this in to our author's head? "As God is infinitely happy, he can have no motive to deceive us." "What then? will it not equally hinder him from burthening us with arbitrary commands?" I see not the connexion here, unless every Being is hindered from acting, who has no motive to act. All the proof he offers that God can't deceive us, is, that from the happiness of his nature, he has no motive to deceive us; yet this may not hinder him from doing it. I can't see how his infinite happiness should hinder his deceiving us, though from his infinite happiness he has no need to do it: Being infinitely happy, he can receive no damage from any hurt befalling his creatures; and if he be not infinitely true, as well as happy, I see not why he may not deceive them, his happiness notwithstanding. But suppose truth a perfection, and infinite truth the perfection of God, and then it is utterly inconsistent with this perfection for God to deceive. If he can prove it as inconsistent with any perfection of Deity, to enjoin any thing positive, I will as readily believe he can deceive, as do the other: But neither the happiness of God, nor any other perfection of his nature, forbids such an exercise of his power.

BUT when he says, "Of the two it is less absurd that God should deceive men for their good, than impose arbitrary commands for their hurt:" How for their hurt? It has been proved, that the rites of the gospel are designed of God, and fitted by him, for the good of mankind. Is this an imposition for their hurt? No; but they are "hurtful, because severe penalties are annexed for non-observance." But according

tording to his own account, are not severe penalties annexed on non-observance of the laws of nature? Are these laws imposed on men therefore for their hurt? Suppose he says no, because these laws are for the good of mankind, and the penalties on non-observance, are, in their first design, to prevent it. The same say I of these positive precepts. Why should their imposition be for the hurt of mankind, more than that of the other? The penalties are too severe. Why? What are they? I find not this specified by him. But they are too severe, because the things enjoined are indifferent. But the performance of the things required in connexion with them, and to which they are assistant, is not indifferent: Nor is it an indifferent thing, whether God be obeyed or disobeyed, when he is pleased to interpose with his authority. And suppose this be done in positive injunctions, this has been shewn to be a right belonging to him; and he may have reason to exercise it, and be kind to his creatures in so doing. And it is undutiful, unreasonable, and unnatural in his creatures, to excuse themselves from obedience, under a pretence, that such injunctions are burdensome. But,

Fifibly, His most clamorous argument is, that these positive rites prove God an arbitrary Being and Ruler. "Those, says he, who assert
"there are such things in Christian Religion,
"make God an arbitrary Being, in supposing
"that though he had for so long a time the
"goodness not to confine mankind to any in-
"different things, he at length changed his
"mind, and repented of his great goodness,
R "and

“and arbitrarily deprived no small number of this liberty.” What, I pray, is an arbitrary Being, or Ruler? In common account, it is one who acts or governs by mere will and pleasure, without regard to reason, right, or equity: *Arbitrariness* is acting according to pleasure, right or wrong. Himself seems to put this sense on the term: “If God can command some things arbitrarily, we cannot be certain but he commands all things so: For though some of his commands relate to things, in their nature good, yet how can we know that an arbitrary Being commands them for this reason? And consequently, since an arbitrary will may change each moment, we can never be certain of the will of such a Being. And elsewhere*, Did men consider how repugnant it is to the divine goodness, to require any thing which they had no reason to obey, but because they have not power to disobey, they would abhor the notion of all arbitrary commands. And again, When men take things merely on authority, reason is discarded, and rational motives cease to operate: Nor can men perform moral duties with a free and ready mind, but slavishly obey, out of fear, the arbitrary commands of a Being, too mighty to be contended with, and that with a view to atone for immoralities.” *Arbitrary*, in these passages, stands opposed to good and reasonable. And an arbitrary will and command is what must be obeyed, merely because back’d with irresistible power.

How now does the institution of some positive rites prove God such an arbitrary Being? “Because it supposes, that after he had the

“goodness,

“goodness, for a long time, not to confine mankind to any indifferent thing, he at length changed his mind, repented of his great goodness, and arbitrarily deprived no small number of this liberty.” On all occasions, he is a wonderful fair representer of facts: So he is here. If he be asked how long mankind were at this liberty, he cannot tell, I am sure. It does not appear from the history of man, that ever God was worshipped without any positive rite. If we consult the Bible, which gives us the oldest history of man, we find that Cain and Abel brought their offerings: Noah immediately after the flood sacrificed. And *heathen history* makes it appear, that such services have prevailed in the *heathen world*, though with idolatrous corruption, in all ages down to our times. He should not, against such appearances, have taken it for granted, that divine goodness left mankind at liberty for ages. If by the law of reason such positives were not bound on mankind, nor could they be; yet if God, in any supernatural way signified his pleasure, to this purpose, the law of reason bound them to obey: nor were they left for ages at liberty.

AND yet, supposing this to be fact, this infers no change of mind in God, any more than changes in the natural world do; as has been observed. His mind, as to this matter, was ever the same. From eternity he purposed to interpose at the fit juncture and time, and had good reasons for so doing. Nor did he repent of his great goodness to mankind, and arbitrarily deprive them of this liberty, but with a manifest condescension to their frailty, and design for their good; and therefore in great

pity and good-will to mankind, instituted some positive rites: Are these arbitrary commands? the effects of mere will and pleasure, without any regard to reason or right?

If he enjoins such things, as a claim of his *undervved* and *unlimited* authority, he does *no wrong*; he may have *reason* for doing it, as has been before observed. Nor will this prove him an *arbitrary Being*. An *absolute Ruler* he is indeed, and as such, it is fit he should be acknowledged by his *Creatures*. But such is the perfection of his nature, that he *must* ever act agreeably to his attributes; and, among the rest, to *wisdom* and *goodness*. Such a Being, however absolute, *cannot* be arbitrary. If *no* reason for a command of his, besides his *mere pleasure*, appear to his creatures, it *may* and *must* be in its *self* right, reasonable, wise and good. Properly, therefore, God *can* command *nothing* arbitrarily. And therefore his inference, "that if he may command *one* thing arbitrarily, he may command *all* things so," may be right from the Premises, but in them he *begs* the *question*.

BUT his argument to enforce this *conclusion* is another specimen of his stating facts fairly, and his close reasoning too. "For though *some* of his commands *relate* to things in their *own* nature good, how can we know, that an *arbitrary Being* commands them for *this* reason?" We may certainly know, he *never* does command any thing for *this* reason: He requires nothing because it is good, or right, or wise, but because he will have it done, *right* or *wrong*. But though this be the case of an *arbitrary Ruler*, an *absolute* one, who frames the *body* of his *laws* for the common security and happiness

happiness of his subjects, if he be an intelligent Being, and capable of *design*, may and must be known to have *their* good in view, in giving them *such* laws; even, though in some few instances he requires obedience, which they may not plainly see have *connexion* with *their* good. And the *positive rites* of the gospel, according to his own account, must be *such*. This he tells us is a republication of the *law of nature*. Every law of nature is for the good of mankind. The *positive rites* of the gospel are but two: is it fair now for him to state the fact as he does? "That *some* of God's laws *relate* to things in "their own nature good;" when himself must own, that the *body* of his laws, under the gospel, not only *relate* to things in their own nature good, but are the very *laws of reason*, having natural connexion with their highest good, both *common* and *personal*? And whenever *these rites*, as has been shewn, are in subordination to the *other*, and to enforce and facilitate *their* performance, what room is there to insinuate, that they are *arbitrary precepts*, and God an *arbitrary ruler* upon this account?

WHEN he tells us, "Did men consider how "repugnant it is to divine goodness, to require any thing which they had no reason "to obey, but because they had not power to "disobey, they would abhor the notion of all "arbitrary commands:" What means he by having no power to disobey? I doubt this is more for the sake of the *jingle* than the *sense*. Means he, that they want *natural power* to break a law of God? Or the *moral power* or *inclination*? If not, how have they no power to disobey? If *yea*, one would think this a very good reason for obedience; especially if they have

have such power to yield it? But upon what he will, have men *no other* reason for obeying a *positive precept*? I should think it a very good and *natural* reason for yielding such obedience, though men *had* a power to disobey, that the great ruler of the world, who knows what is *fit* to be required, and *can* do nothing inconsistent with the perfections of *his nature*, has given such a command. But,

“When men, says he, take things merely *on authority*, rational motives *cease* to operate; nor can men perform moral duties *with a free and ready mind*.” Not, one would hope, when they take things on the *authority* of God. Methinks *this* should be sufficient reason for acting; and when this influences to act, a *very rational* motive operates. Nor can I see how acting on God’s *authority*, should hinder the performance of moral duties *with a free and ready mind*. I have ever thought, that it is *this authority* which binds to their performance. Though the consideration, that they are reasonable, and for *our good*, may move to their performance, it is *divine authority* conjoining it, that immediately makes them *our duty*; and it is very strange, that what makes them *duty* should hinder the performing them *with a free and ready mind*. It must be an exceeding *dutiful* temper, sure, which makes men backward to their duty, because God has made it so, and bound it on men by the most *indisputable authority*.

Or are we to understand him, that, because God has instituted *some positive rites*, this must make men perform the duties of morality *with a less free and ready mind*? Why so? Are they *less duties*, or *less reasonable* for that God has en-

enjoined some positive observances? If not, why should they not still be as freely and readily obeyed? Has God broke in upon any rights of theirs by such institution? The contrary has been made evident, I would hope. It must be from mere *passive sullenness*, then, if they are more backward to the performance of natural duty on this account. But when it is considered, that such positive institutions are designed, in circumstances that required such helps, as subsidiary to the better performing the duties of natural religion, one would think, that both themselves should be obeyed with a free and ready mind, and help to perform moral duties with greater readiness and freedom, and not with less.

But he goes on, "But slavishly obey, out of fear, the arbitrary commands of a being too mighty to be contended with, and thus with a view to atone for immoralities." It has been shewn, that the undervived and absolute authority of the most wise, beneficent, and every way perfect beings, is a rational motive to free and willing obedience. If the irresistible power of such a being excites fear, and prompts more effectually to obedience, is not this a reasonable and natural effect and influence? Is this affection and spring of action in man to be wholly useless in religion? Is there no reasonable duty but what is the result of love? This, it is to be owned, is the most pleasing, and, perhaps, powerful spring of obedience; but human nature being influenced to action, by all the affections implanted in it, to make fear of no use in religion, nor not in a state of trial and imperfection, would, I should think, be a greater reflection on divine wisdom, than the

institution of some positive rites. It is true, perfect love casts out fear. But where love is imperfect, fear may assist in exciting to duty.

NOR is all fear prompting to obedience *slavish*. A child may love to please a parent, and do what he requires; and an *ingenuous* spirit will, by this principle, be powerfully prompted to obedience. And yet fear of offending a good and kind parent, mingling its forces with the other, may render his obedience more general and *punctual*; whereas a slave does all from fear and constraint. And a child, when he sees his parent's commands in general aim at his good, may both rationally and freely yield obedience to some, without perceiving they have such a tendency. And since this, as has been observed, is the case as to God's commands, this carriage would surely be more dutiful in his children, with regard to a few positives required by him, than to call these arbitrary precepts, and him an arbitrary Being, on their account. Nor would they yield obedience to such commands, merely out of fear (as he tells us "the commands of a tyrant" may be) but out of *dutiful affection*. If they are not "rational laws," in his sense, they may yet engage the affection of a reasonable creature. So wise and *beneficent* a Being as God appears in the body of his laws, deserves to be trusted by his subjects in positive institutions, nor should they rise up in arms against him, as an arbitrary ruler and tyrant, because they do not see these as naturally, necessarily, and evidently connected with their good, as his natural laws. A little more deference to his wisdom is due from

from them; and a little more reverence in talking of God, than *this author* uses here, would be more decent in one, who professes a regard for natural religion, and would not write men into a contempt of all.

BUT why men should be "under a necessity" to use positive institutions, only with a view "to atone for immoralities," is past my understanding. That they may abuse them in this manner is allowed; but that they must, appears not from the nature of the thing; and the contrary appears in fact. Thousands have used them, and still use them, who make as much conscience of all the duties of morality, as any do; who decry and reject such rites. And is it not unnatural to say, that rites instituted in themselves, and appointed of God to subserve morality, must yet be used to atone for immoralities; that is, must necessarily be perverted and abused, and destroy their own end? *This gentleman* is such a master of reason, that from propositions not self-evident, he can draw conclusions both certain and necessary. But,

Secondly, He would insinuate, that such positive rites are of mischievous consequence to mankind. That they may be so through men's abuse, is not gainsaid; but if they are in their institution designed, and in themselves fitted to contrary purposes, this is no objection against them. The best gifts of God to his creatures may be perverted and abused by them, through their own weakness and wickedness, and made to destroy their own end. Even reason it self, so much celebrated by *this author*, may be, and often is, perverted and abused. Should God

God therefore never have bestowed this gift on men? If he might, why may he not institute religious rites for right valuable ends, though liable also to perversion and abuse? This is really a *fall answer* to all he has to object under this head. But let us a little attend him. And, *He insinuates, That positive institutions divert mens attention from the more important things of religion.* "Whatever," says he, "diverts from, or discourages the observation and practice of morality, must be highly injurious to mankind. The more the mind is taken up with the observation of things not of a moral nature, the less it will be able to attend to those that are, which requiring the application of the *whole mind*, can never be rightly performed, whilst the mind, by laying stress on *other things*, is diverted from attending to *them*." What now does he mean by the application of the *whole mind*? Is it, that the mind must be *totally and solely* employed in the duties of morality? How then shall it have time for enjoying *those liberties*, in which, he tells us, so much of human happiness consists in liberty, I mean, in *indifferents*. Or, means he, that though we may have *leisure* to enjoy these liberties, we must yet be so intent on the practice of morality, that we can have *no leisure* to use *any such means*, though appointed of God, to promote the practice of morality? Yet he talks of mens being *at liberty* to choose *such means*. Or, may men choose *such means themselves*, without being diverted by them from the practice of morality; but if God, infinite-

infinitely better, and fitter to chuse, appointed
such for them, they must hereby be directed?
Is this consistent talk? God has been pleased
in the Gospel to appoint *few* plain, simple
means of *this* sort, designed and fitted to pro-
mote *universal* morality. How should *this* be
injurious to mankind? Must they be diverted
from the practice of morality, whilst rightly
and religiously using such means for promoting
it? Is this reasoning, or *senseless* reproach, and
abuse of God and his sacred institutions? If he
means only, that *wise* men should be practi-
sing a *duty* of morality, they should not be using
the *means*: This is admitted. But *time* may
be allowed for *each*, and then they will not in-
terfere; but *the means*, according to their design
and nature, will subserve *the end* for which they
were appointed. But, *judgment* *ad* *verum* *non*

"It reason be heard, says he? no *unnecef-*
"sary thing will be admitted. If *not*, where
"shall we stop?" *Whose* reason is to judge
what is fit in religious worship? Is *human* rea-
son, *his* reason to be the director of the world's
ruler? Must God enjoin his creatures *nothing*
which they think *unnecessary* in religion? Is this
consonant to the *nature* and *reason* of things?
But if what is here advanced be true, how is
his talk, of mens being at liberty to chuse the
means for *themselves*, according to *their* discretion,
consistent with it? Will all the means chosen
by mens discretion be *necessary*? Or if not, is
all liberty of *thems*, about this matter, gone
too? But should God think *proper* to enjoin
some things in religion, which to *this* author's
great wisdom seem *unnecessary*, what will fol-
low? — "Where then shall we stop?" just
where

where our supreme Ruler stops. Let us have no rites in religion but of his institution, and all will be well.

BUT, "If once people are brought to believe *such things* are good for any thing, they'll be apt to believe them good for all things, they'll be punctual in observing these, in hopes to atone for indulging *darling vices*." Means he, that this is the *natural tendency* of the institutions themselves; or only, that they are *liable to such abuse*? If the former, it has been made appear he is mistaken; if the latter, and this be a reason for their *non-institution*, it is to be feared, many, if not all the duties of natural religion, are to be discarded on the same foot; it being but too customary for men to be punctual in performing *some* moral duties, to compound, if not atone, for the neglect of others; and God must, at this rate, enjoin nothing that men may corrupt and abuse. But,

2dly. HE objects, *That such things, in conjunction with moral duties, tend to depreciate morality.* "Nothing, says he, can be of worse consequence, than to depreciate morality, by mixing things of an *indifferent* nature; men being more or less virtuous, according to the value they put on virtue. And can a man, who acts *contrary to reason*, not be an enemy to a religion *founded on reason*? The precepts of natural religion cannot but make strong impressions. What is fixed in mens minds, and wrought into their constitution, cannot easily be broken through. *Human nature* is apt to start and recoil at such an attempt." But what means he by *mixing things*

things of an indifferent nature with morality? Because God has been pleased to institute some religious rites in subserviency to morality, has he therefore blended them with morality? Does not himself tell us, "That means are valuable only for their end?" Are these any other than instrumental duties of religion? Valuable therefore, on this account only, and because God has thought fit to enjoin them. How then is morality, a duty required for its own sake, depreciated by them? Means appointed and fitted to promote it, raise men's value for it, and make them free and ready for the performance of it? Suppose "Men more or less virtuous, according to the value they put on virtue, may they not therefore be improv'd in virtue by such means?" Can they have any tendency to sink mens value for virtue, that are appointed of God, and fit in themselves to promote the practice of virtue? If so, it must be either as they are means, or, of divine appointment. If as means, all means to make men virtuous, even if self-chosen, must lessen mens value for virtue. If as means of divine appointment, the self same means, had not God appointed them, had had no such effect; which sounds, at least, exceeding odd. Can God's command render means so very mischievous, which if men had devised and chosen, would have had the contrary, at least, no such ill effect?

WHAT next follows, appears to me in no connexion with what is gone before; "And can a man, who acts contrary to reason, not be an enemy to a religion founded on reason?" Unless he means, that every one who

who observes a *positive rite* as enjoined of God, acts *contrary* to reason, and can't but be an enemy to a religion founded on reason, or *that* of nature. I wonder why, and have given the reader good reason why he should not take *his word* for it. I should think one can never be proved an *enemy to reason*, or any religion founded on it, by *this* reason, that he takes the command of the wise, and good, and righteous ruler of the world, as a *sufficient reason*, why he should pay regard to a positive institution; nay, that the infinite wisdom and goodness of God, is as good a reason for obeying such a command, as if he could see it in *necessary connexion* with his happiness. And yet I know no reason *else*, he has, for *this* assertion, if I take him right.

BUT it were to be wished what he next says, however connected, were universally true, viz. "That the precepts of natural religion cannot but make impression, &c." But how to reconcile it with much of his talk, *here* and *elsewhere*, is not so easy. It is strange, that there should be such mischief ensuing from *positive precepts*, and that *superstition* should have such power over men, when "What is *fixed* in their minds, and wrought into their constitution (which he here insinuates the religion of nature is) is so hardly broken through, and human nature is so apt to start and recoil at such an attempt." And *priests* must be very *cunning fellows*, if not endued with *omnipotence*, that can work men, at pleasure, into such obsequious creatures, as to fall in so readily with *their devices*; "whose nature so much starts and recoils at every *such attempt*, and the religion of nature can so *hardly* be broken through." But it is not to be expect-

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ed, that one engaged in a quarrel with Christianity should be well consistent with himself. But, says he, to suppose things indifferent, equally commanded with matters of morality, tends to make men believe they are equally necessary; nay, with the superstitious, will get the better of them. And people will be apt to put a greater stress on some things in religion than their nature will bear, and confound the greatest and smallest things. But what means he by this supposition? Or by being equally commanded? If only, that the same authority enjoins them, he is right. But how does this tend to make men believe, that positive rites are equally necessary with moral duties? Are all the laws of nature themselves equally necessary, because required by the same authority? If two duties of reason can't be perform'd at once, must not the lesser give place? And has not scripture plainly determined, that where rituals and morals interfere, rituals must give way? How then are they made equally necessary? Are the instrumental duties of religion equally necessary in themselves, with those higher and more important duties, which they are required to subserve? And if this be plainly declared in the revelation that enjoins them, how should the requiring them have the tendency he talks of?

If the "superstitious will make them more necessary," lay greater stress on some things than their nature will bear, and confound the greatest and smallest things, the command is not answerable for this, nor contributes any thing towards it. Nor is there any such

such *natural tendency* in the institution, especially considering what *caution* is every where given in *scripture* against such abuse. *Superstition* has turned the natural command of *worshipping* God into *idolatry*. Is this command chargeable with this consequence? Or must God give no command but what it is out of the power of *folly* and *wickedness* to misunderstand or pervert?

3dly. HE would persuade us, *that the enjoining such positives promotes superstition*. "If men," says he^f, have been always obliged to avoid "superstition, as well as embrace true religion, there must have been at all times sufficient marks of distinction between them, or, between entertaining notions worthy or unworthy of God. But how can this be, if what is superstition by the law of nature may by revelation be made a part of religion?" If the *essence* of religion consists in believing and practising such things as have a *real excellency* in them, tending to the honour of God, and the good of man; the *essence* of superstition, its *opposite*, must consist in *imagining to propitiate God by such things as have no worth nor excellency in them*." Here we have two different notions of *superstition*; in the first paragraph, it consists "in entertaining *unworthy* notions of God;" in the other "the *essence* of it consists in imagining to propitiate God by such things as have *no worth nor excellency in them*, such as may as well not be done as done, as well done *this way* as *that*." And here is made the *opposite* to religion, which certainly is not superstition, but *irreligion*; superstition being only reli-

religion corrupted; and himself had told us in the first paragraph, that God is the object of both; it is religion then, but false and corrupted by wrong notions of God. And yet in the next sentence a notion of *superstition* is given different from both the other. "It is an *impious* piety by which men consider God as so *light* and *passionate*, as with *trivial* things to be *appeased* or *moved* to *wrath*." And yet from *Plutarch* we have a different account of it still. "It is imagining God *fickle*, *inconstant*, *prone* to *anger*, *full* of *indignation* for *mere trifles*, *ready* to *revenge* himself on the *slightest* occasion, whom men have more reason to *hate* and *abominate*, than *love*, *honour* and *reverence*." In which of these senses must we fix, that it may be made out, that it is promoted by God's instituting *positive* rules? True it is, that Dr. *Moore's* account of *superstition*, the *third* here mentioned, and *Plutarch's* too, imply *unworthy* thoughts of God; but all *unworthy* thoughts of God imply not *superstition* in their sense. I should think it a very *unworthy* notion of God, to imagine his governing wisdom must in every command of his, act according to the judgment of his creatures, and require nothing but what they can see to be in *necessary*, *antecedent* connexion with their good; and to tell him he has no authority to give such commands, but acts *arbitrarily*, and *unbecoming* his own perfections, and relations to his creatures, by so doing. And yet this talk implies no "dread of God, as a Being apt to be provoked and full of indignation for trifles; and whom we should hate and abominate,"

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rather than love, honour and reverence." But I can't say, that it leads not rather to *contempt* such a Being than love him, with any *due mixture* of honour and reverence.

It is also an *unworthy* notion of God to "Imagine he may be propitiated by things of *no worth and excellency*;" or, in Dr. Moore's phrase, "may be appeased with *trivial things*." But it may be as *unworthy* a notion of God to imagine, he is *never* displeased or provoked to wrath, or *must* be appeased and reconciled to offenders, *without* any vindication of his injured authority, though *this* be in general for *the good* of the world, or all his rational creatures and subjects. But,

"If the *essence* of religion, says he, consists, *Ec.* the *essence* of superstition, its opposite, *must* consist, *Ec.*" for which, as usual, we have no other proof than his bare *say so*. And the term religion is used by us either in a more *general* or *restrained* sense; in the former sense it is comprehensive of all those *truths* and *duties* which we are bound to believe and practise, as *coming from God*, whether by discovery *natural* or *supernatural*. Thus we say, the *Christian religion*, and the *Mahometan religion*, meaning such principles and rules as the followers of *Mahomet* receive as from God. In the more restrained sense 'tis taken for the duties of piety; but in *no sense* does the *essence* of religion consist in the belief and "practice of things, in his sense, having a real excellency in them, as tending to the honour of God and good of men;" or, as he should *honestly* have expressed it, tending to the *honour* of God, by being good for men; *that is*,
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naturally, necessarily, and antecedently to the command having this tendency. The essence of religion consists not in the belief and practice of such things only, and perhaps never did; but in believing *what* God reveals either by light natural or supernatural, and doing what he commands; whether we can perceive an antecedent reason for the command, as naturally connected with our good, or no other reason for it but *his pleasure*. There is a real excellency in yielding obedience to a command of God, when his pleasure is made known, though there were none in doing the thing *it self* by him required.

AND true religion may consist in the belief and practice of every thing that is for the honour of God and good of mankind, and he has at the same time required, should be believed and practised. But it is to be feared, too much scope would be given to *superstition*, if all things men believe to be for the honour of God and good of mankind, were admitted into religion, and made *essential* to it. The priests, on this foot, would certainly be too hard for him. All men will not see with *his eyes*, nor think those things *only* excellent, &c. which he vouchsafes to honour with *his esteem*. And I am mistaken, if some things *very excellent*, and much for the honour of God and good of mankind, are not to be admitted into religion at all, were *his judgment* to be made the *standard*, since proper piety, as before has been shewn, has in *his scheme*, little or nothing to do in religion.

BUT admitting "the essence of religion to consist in believing and practising, &c." why

must *superstition*, its opposite, consist, "in imagining to propitiate God by things that have no worth or excellency?" Do these things stand in such opposition? Had he said, that the essence of *superstition* must consist in believing and doing what is for the dishonour of God, and prejudice of mankind, this had been a practice and belief opposite to the former, but is no account of *superstition*, but *Irreligion* and *Immorality*. *Superstition* is not *irreligion*, but false religion: It means the honour of God and good of mankind, but mistakes the method of doing it; and so is a different thing from religion, but not its opposite.

BUT supposing his notion of *superstition* right, either in Dr. Moore's, *Plutarch's*, or his own sense, what tendency has God's appointing the positive rites of the Gospel to promote *superstition*? Do they give us any unworthy notions of God? The contrary. I would hope has been made fully to appear. Do they suggest, that God is to be propitiated by things of no worth or excellency? What things are these? Are these rites themselves instituted for this end? Do they not suppose God already propitious to men? And are they not standing memorials of his own method of removing what was a bar to the free current of his rich mercy, the obstacle that forbid the pardon of sinners, and his reconciliation to them? Do they represent God as a light and passionate Being, with trivial things to be appeased or provoked to wrath? How can that be, when they set forth Jesus Christ as crucified for sinners, and pouring out his blood to purge from the guilt of sin? Or is a slight of God's authority,

ty, and disobedience to his commands, a trivial thing? Or is it an concern of his, both for his own honour and his subjects' good, to guard his authority from contempt, and impress men with a becoming sense of it? Surely, both as a wise and good Being, such concern becomes the Ruler of the world. And these rites represent him as angry with sin and sinners, but on the justest grounds, and not to be appeased without shewing a due concern to vindicate his injured authority, on which also the good of his subjects, since his laws are so manifestly for their happiness, must much depend.

Now are the rites instituted by him "gladly shews, and pompous ceremonies, to dazzle the eyes, and bewitch the vulgar," and by this means lead them into superstition, or call "men off from a reverence for religion to a reverence for the clergy;" but plain, simple rites, becoming the gravity and simplicity of christian worship, and fitted to promote real, inward, and spiritual religion, love to God and man. They set before men's eyes the most glorious proofs of God's good-will to sinful men, at the same time that they represent him awfully concerned for his honour, and that of his laws. And what can more powerfully engage the love, honour, and reverence owing to him, than such an union of motives? But,

"How can there be marks of distinction between true religion and superstition, if what is superstition by the law of nature, may by revelation be made a part of religion?" Nothing that is superstition, according

ing to his account, can by revelation be made a part of religion; nothing that implies "unworthy thoughts of God;" that represents God "as a light and passionate Being, &c." "as a fickle, inconstant Being," full of indignation for trifles, &c. or, "that may be provoked by things of no worth, &c." But when from these accounts of superstition he argues against Gospel rites, he begs the question throughout, and abuses the unwary reader.

BUT in another sense of the word, what is *superstitious* by the law of nature, may by revelation be made a part of religion. Rites of religious worship appointed of God, though in accommodation to human weakness, can have no tendency to superstition, and when explained and attended with cautions against abuse, and prohibitions of additional human rites, must be a proper bar against it.

WHEN men, on their own heads, bring such things into religion, whatever be the pretence for them, this, if he pleases, he may call *superstition*. As the fancies of men are boundless, unless they are laid under restraint, such rites will be multiplied beyond measure. And, *what* should set bounds to them? The *reason* of things? But, who shall judge for every man, or community of men, *what* is the reason of things, but *themselves*? And when, as he tells us, superstition, or an humour of putting trifles in the room of religion, is so much the foible of mankind, what should prevent the multiplication of such rites? Nothing but an entire prohibition of man's meddling, seems sufficient. It seems therefore a dictate

of natural light, that men should make no such rites of their own heads; and the doing it may be superstition. And what is superstitious, whilst resting solely on human authority, may, by divine command, be made an instrumental duty of religion. And however indifferent a thing it was before, and in it self still remains, as it is stamp'd with divine authority for such holy end and use, it ceases to be indifferent, and becomes so far necessary as the divine command makes it. Man is no longer at liberty to do or forbear, at pleasure. If the great author of nature has not power, thus far to interpose, and change the nature of things, when to him it seems fit, he has no power. Such power man has not, nor therefore can have any authority to introduce such rites into religion. To observe human rites may be superstitious, where it may be a part of religion to observe such as are divine; the supreme Ruler having authority, certainly, to bind men to such observance.

Ably. He would persuade us, the institution of such rites are mischievous, because it prompts men to cruelty and mischief. "If men, says he, are made to believe there are things necessary to salvation which have no relation to the good of mankind, they must suppose it their duty to use such means as will most effectually serve this purpose; and that God in requiring the end, requires all those means that will best secure and propagate it. And it is to this principle, inquisitions, persecutions, massacres and crusades are owing. Such as are governed by this principle can nei-

"neither the good men, good princes, good
 "subjects, good citizens, or good neighbours.
 "No ties of friendship or gratitude, no vows
 "or oaths *can bind them*, when the interest
 "of such things, which they think, they are
 "bound to, on pain of divine displeasure, require
 "the contrary conduct." *What principle can*
he mean, but "that there are things in re-
 "ligion, which have no relation to the good
 "of mankind?" *What good?* Their tempo-
ral good; whether common or personal? Have
 christian rites *no such relation*, when the de-
 sign of both is to bind men to the perfor-
 mance of *all christian duties*? Have these *no*
 relation to the good of mankind? Are not
 men bound by them, *to owe no man any thing,*
but to love one another? A debt ever owing,
 and ever to be in paying; but never to be
 paid off. And is not one of them specially
 designed to enkindle and enflame the most dis-
 interested love, and *extensive benevolence*. Nor
 are those rites made *necessary* to salvation any
 otherwise than as *means* of religion, and in-
 stances of obedience to divine command. They
 may never be observed, and yet men may be
 saved, if they thoroughly believe and obey the
 gospel, and do not neglect them out of *wilful*
disobedience.

BUT let us hear what he would hence infer.
 "If men are made to believe, *&c.* they *must*
 "suppose it their duty to use such means as
 "will *most effectually* serve this purpose." *What*
purpose? That of their salvation? And what
 will *effectually* serve this purpose, but the dis-
 gent use of the necessary means? This one
 would hope will do no mischief. "And that
 "God

"God, by requiring the end, (viz. their salvation) requires also all the means that will best secure and propagate it." Without doubt: What are *these means*, but those he has enjoined? Suppose these have no natural connexion with the good of mankind, and yet they think them *necessary* as means, what *bars* can they do mankind, by using them for their own salvation?

Or are we to understand him of the *salvation of others*? "Men, who believe such things are necessary to the salvation of others, must suppose it their duty to use such means, &c." What purpose again? The *salvation of others*. What means will *most effectually* serve this purpose? What they think the necessary means of salvation. And how shall they use these means, effectually or ineffectually, for the salvation of others?

BUT let us put a *sense* to his words, which they do not imply, and suppose he means, "they must think it their duty, to use the most effectual means, to bring others to the use of the means they think necessary to salvation." And that God, by requiring the end (which in this case must be the bringing men to use the necessary means of salvation) has required all those means, that will best secure and promote it." Have all men, who thus believe, such a concern for the salvation of others, that they must use these means for it? Or, are they under a necessity to think this their duty? And what are the most effectual means for this end? And which they must think it their duty to use? The best means to secure and propagate this end?

end? One would think, the best and most effectual means, should be none other than what reason advises, or God prescribes. No one can reasonably think, that they must necessarily suppose it their duty, to use means utterly unreasonable, and forbidden of God. Yet such men plainly means, by telling us, that to this principle, inquisitions, persecutions, &c. are owing. Are these the most effectual means to serve this purpose? the best means, &c. That is, to make men use the means of salvation. How can crusades, massacres, and persecution be effectual means, the best means to serve this purpose? Are murdering or hurting men any means for such an end? Does nature point out any such means? Does revelation require or countenance such? Would not this self, when in humour for it, pronounce these improper and ineffectual means for this end? So far from being the best, that they are the very worst and most unnatural that can be, and most destructive of the end.

Now, does he not tell us, That these are venerable practices, and the principles whence they flow, pretend to no authority from the laws of reason or nature, but only from misinterpreted texts of the Old Testament, plainly contradictory to the New? This is not this asserting, that they have no authority from reason or revelation? Why then must those who think rites enjoined of God, are necessary means of salvation, think themselves under necessity to use such venerable means to make men use them? Does this belief of itself necessitate such use? May not this be believed, and

and yet men believe at the same time, that no violence is to be used, to make others use these means of salvation? Nay, that nothing but argument and persuasion, with conviction of truth, are proper means to bring men in to any religious sentiments, practices, or usages whatever? And that all other means are injurious in themselves, *hateful* to God, and a reproach to any and every religion supposed to countenance them? I can see no necessary connexion between this principle, and such execrable practices.

But when he adds, "That such as are governed by this principle, can neither be good men, &c. No ties of gratitude or friendship, no oaths or vows can bind them, &c." I should think it flies in the face of his own knowledge and experience. He cannot but know some in this sentiment, good men, subjects, citizens, and neighbours; as good as any in his own sentiment. Whom all natural and religious ties do bind, as far as they should. Indeed, no ties can bind to break a divine command, whether about a positive or natural duty; because a divine command is superior to all other ties. No friend, no benefactor can lay any under obligations equal to this: Nor can any oath or vow bind to a breach of a law of God. For were this admitted, a man might, by such oath or vow, cancel all obligations to obey God at once. It would be only to vow and swear, *he would keep none of God's commands*, and the business were done. Which none, one would think, should be *wild* enough to affirm or believe.

I DARE say, *he* does not think *ties* of friendship or gratitude, bind a man to the *prejudices* of the *publick*; or that oaths and vows bind a man to be a *traitor* to his country, because his obligations to his *country* are greater than to any friend or benefactor. The same is to be said, where *ties* to a friend or benefactor, come in competition with divine commands. All *ties* else in this case, are unty'd. *Inferior* obligations must give way to *superior* ones. They cannot bind, where *these* do and must. And it is from God's *authority*, all other obligations immediately derive *their* force. That God's *will* should direct the *creature's* behaviour, is the great maxim and principle of natural religion. It is not a law, strictly speaking, but by the intervention of God's *authority*, and his signification of *his* pleasure to this purpose. And the signification of his pleasure, that a *positive* rite should be observed, makes *that* a law, and as really binding; though the thing enjoined be not of *equal* importance. God is in no instance to be disobeyed: Not only because he has *power irresistible*, but because he has a *right* to command; and in the exercise of it, is guided by *unerring* wisdom, and all other *governing* *perfections*. And if he has bound all christians to promote, by all *proper* *methods*, the salvation of all men, no *other* *ties* should hinder, no vows or oaths to the contrary should restrain them. These bind not *against* God's authority, when all their obliging force is derived *from* it. And if this be *what* he means, in this talk, it is admitted, but implies nothing *criminal*.

BUT

BUT God requires no *faibleſs* or *injurious* methods of promoting or propagating *his* religion, or any part of it: And if this is what he would *inſinuate* in this talk, he is highly *injurious* to it. Nor do I ſee, why the *principle*, he would load with thoſe miſchievous effects, ſhould put any, who *underſtand* *chriſtianity*, on theſe meaſures, whiſt they are *themſelves*, and act conſiſtently with the religion they profeſs. Such cannot but know that *ingratitude*, *perſidy*, *perjury*, *treachery*, *violence* and all *iniuſtice* are condemned by their religion, and muſt expoſe them to the *divine diſpleaſure*, though employ'd in propagating religion. Nay and *the more* for being thus employ'd: Becauſe ſuch methods of propagating religion, muſt give a very diſadvantageous character of it and its *author* to the world, and highly *diſhonour* and *reproach* both. But

“ALL religion, ſays^a he, inclines men to *imitate* what they worſhip. And they who believe “God will *damn* men for things *not moral*, muſt believe, that to ſhew themſelves *holy* as their heavenly father is *holy*, they can't ſhew too much “enmity to *theſe*, againſt whom he declares eternal “enmity: or plague *them* too much in *this* life, “on *whom* he'll pour down the plagues of eternal “vengeance in the *life to come*.” It is granted that religion inclines men to imitate the God they worſhip, in thoſe perfections of his which are *imitable*. But all *true* religion muſt reſtrain them, from an imitation of him, in *what diſtinguiſhes* him from every other Being: ſince this were not to honour *him*, but deify *themſelves*. And ſurely to aſſume his ſovereign rights, and puniſh men in *this* world, becauſe he will puniſh them *hereafter*, without a warrant from him, and much more in defiance of his *prohibition*, is what no religion can never prompt

prompt men to, but where it has its ~~due~~ influence, must lay them under an *effectual* restraint.

BUT we have here again a *specimen* of his usual candour. What christian, acting as his religion directs, believes God will *damn* any man for things *not moral*? Nothing is made damning by christianity but *wilful* disobedience to God, impenitently persisted in, and *wilful* rejection of his offered mercy by *Jesus Christ*. It is not refusing to be *washed*, for instance, that makes any liable to condemnation, but *wilfully* refusing this to an holy end, when a person knows, God has required it to be done. And to disobey a *known* command of the supreme ruler, is with his leave an *immoral* thing. And even under the *Old Testament*, it was *here* the stress was laid. *Rituals* recommended not to divine favour, but *obedience* to divine command, and *disobedience* was what exposed to divine displeasure. *I spake not to your fathers—concerning burnt-offerings or sacrifices: but this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and walk in all the ways I have commanded you.* As under the *New Testament* the stress is laid on *faith*, keeping the commands of God, a *new creature*. It is no where said men shall be damned if not *baptized*, if they do not *eat and drink bread and wine*, &c. though it is, that they shall be *damned* if they *believe not*, or *wilfully* reject the Saviour and salvation by him, when proposed with sufficient evidence. And if a man *believes*, *repents* of sin, becomes a *new creature*, and *keeps the commands* of God, should he omit these rites, provided this be not done out of *wilful disobedience* to the divine command, what warrant has any from *scripture*, to pronounce such a one damned? It is *sincere* obedience, not what is in every particular *complete* and without defect, that entitles to salvation. And of the *sincerity* of obedience, he only who *knows the heart*, is judge. The best

^b Jer. vii. 21, 22.

^c Mark xvi. 16.

best christians are conscious of *so many* defects in their own duties, as to cry out, with the publican, *God be merciful to us sinners.* And those who know many gracious allowances must be made in their own case, will not be forward to pass a sentence of condemnation on others. And though *one* wilful sin, *impenitently* persisted in (could such a case be supposed) will damn; yet who, without knowledge of the heart, can pretend to say a sin, especially of *omission*, is a *wilful one*? Wilful disobedience to the law of nature, is in part damning in *this author's* sense. Yet there are few living but are guilty of manifold *omissions.* In many things we offend all.

AND even as to *those* he believes likely to be under such a sentence, I see not, that he *must*, to shew himself *holy as God is holy*, believe he can't show *too much* enmity, &c. For God declares *eternal enmity* against no particular person whilst alive, but only against such as die *impenitent.* That any will die in this state, can by no man be *antecedently* known: nor therefore on whom "God will pour down the plagues of eternal vengeance." There is *no room*, therefore, for christians to imitate the holiness of God, in such enmity and plaguing, because they *know not* whom to make the object of their enmity, or to plague.

BUT supposing this *were known*, why *must* they believe themselves bound, &c. Because, in the time of retribution, *ill men* shall meet with a *just recompence of their evil deeds*, from the righteous judge of all the earth, must *good men* believe themselves bound, to take this work out of *his* hands, before the time comes, and turn the *season of trial*, into that of recompence? Must they set up for judges in his room? Can their religion prompt them to this? A deed *so injurious* to God and their fellow-creatures? Is this agreeable to the apostle's maxim,

maxim, ^a *That the servant of the Lord must be gentle toward all men, apt to teach, patient (or forbearing.)* ^b *Not apt to strive or strike, in meekness instructing those who oppose themselves, if peradventure God may give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth?* Or that saying of another apostle, ^c *That the wisdom that is from above, is pure, indeed, but peaceable, gentle, full of mercy and good fruits.*

CAN any more openly avow their hatred to God, than those who persecute them, with the utmost spite for his sake? And how are they to carry it towards them? Is there the least hint in the gospel, that they should treat them with enmity, and plague them to the uttermost, when in their power? Is not the quite contrary Usage bound upon them, in the plainest and strongest terms? ^d *I say to you, bless them which curse you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you.* And this, in imitation of their heavenly father, who during the time of their trial, makes his sun to shine and his rain to fall on them, as well as others, and affords them a share in the common kindneses of providence. Is not himself sensible that *this* is the meaning of this passage? since he tells us, “the priests have found out a way, to evade the force of *this* precept, by telling us we must hate God’s enemies,” (plainly shewing, that he looks on this talk, as an abuse of such precepts.) And why then must christians believe, that they are bound to plague and pursue with *utmost enmity*, those whom God will hereafter plague with *eternal vengeance*? I own, I can see no necessity for it.

NAY, does not *himself* allow, that God will in part damn the transgressors of the law of nature, in an after-state? And that they will there suffer intolerable anguish? Will not this, so far, prove them the objects of God’s hatred? Must all, therefore,

^a 2 Tim. ii. 24, 25. ^b 1 Tim. iii. 3. ^c Jam. iii. 17.

^d Matt. v. 44, 45.

fore, who imitate God, think themselves bound, in *this life*, to hate them too, and plague them *now*, because he will plague them *hereafter*; provided this be *not* done, for their *destruction*, but *reformation*? which, with him, is God's *design*, in plaguing them hereafter. Or must such a treatment pass for *pure, disinterested* love, because it has such a kind intention? The sufferers, I suppose, would hardly give it so *soft* a name; though he tells us, God's punishing the breakers of the natural law even with *anguish intolerable*, is in him an act of *pure, impartial* and *disinterested* love. And so, though men *may* not, in imitation of an *holy God*, pursue his enemies with enmity, they *may*, it seems, in imitation of him *who is love its self*, torment them with *anguish intolerable*, for their *reformation*, though not for their *destruction*. Must the observers of the natural law, believe this *their* duty, ^b because all religion inclines men to imitate what they worship? Why must *christians* believe the other *their* duty, for *this* reason? I can see no ground for such an inference, much less a *necessity* for it.

BUT if *ill men* imposing on *weak men*, can teach them to draw so unnatural an inference, the same may be done, by like *instruments* and *means*, from his *own account* of the law of nature. But if, in neither case, it be a reasonable or right inference (and it is such in *both* or *neither*) why is this *mischievous consequence* fastened by him, on persons owning themselves obliged to observe *positive rites* of *divine institution*? Or even believing them *necessary* to *salvation*? since himself believes the duties of natural religion, *necessary* to human happiness *hereafter* as well as *here*, if he be in earnest. But

Fifthly, He would ⁱ persuade us, that the admitting *positives* into religion, *makes men liable to be*

imposed on, by cheats and even mad-men. Do suppose, says he, "That there may be things in religion, not founded in *reason* and *nature*, reserved for *this* or *that* period of time, opened a way to all the *visions* and *reveries* of enthusiasts. To *this* are owing all the *false* revelations, which have been in the world. And without supposing certain *tests*, flowing from the nature of things, by which the *meanest* capacities may distinguish *truth* from *falsehood*, we shall ever be liable to be imposed on by *mad-men*, as well as *cheats*." What he means by things not founded in nature and reason, under this head, has been sufficiently explained. And the supposing there may be such things in religion, opened a way, it seems, to all, &c. What even of them, who have renounced all *rites*, and outward worship? those of *Quakers*, *Quinists*, &c. But suppose him to speak of *supernatural revelation* here as well as *positive institutions*; certain it is, that had not a revelation from God been supposed *possible*, and that positive rites *might* by him be instituted, none could have pretended that any such were of *divine* authority. If this is all he means, it amounts to no more, than that such a *supposition* must precede such *pretences*. What then? Was this supposition also a *revery*? or a *reasonable* supposition? If it were *its self* a *revery*, it did not open a way to *all*. But if it were a *reasonable* supposition, then reason opened a way to *all* these *reveries*, since that suggested such a supposition.

AND why must it be a *revery*? Is it an *absurdity* in its self, for God to make *supernatural discoveries* to the mind of man? or communicate *such* notices to him, as from the *use* of his *reason* he could never have had? for instance, his own purposes concerning *future events*. Or is there any thing repugnant to *reason* or the *nature* of things, in his making such *discoveries*, if possible? Does it stand in opposition to any *perfection*

tion of his nature? To say it is *impossible*, is certainly no better than a *revery*: And it carries no inconsistency, one would think, with any perfection of *Deity*, in it, if the circumstances of his creatures require such communications. When religion, then, was so universally corrupted, as has before been shewn, was it any way *repugnant* to divine perfections, for God, in a way *supernatural*, to communicate his mind to men, and rectify this abuse? To which? to his *goodness*? Then it was better for them to remain in this corrupt state, than by such means to be recovered out of it, and a greater *kindness* of God to them. To his *wisdom*? then when *himself* was so much dishonoured, and *mankind* so generally out of the way to happiness, it was acting *unwisely* in him to interpose with a revelation, for the sake of his own honour and the good of mankind. And it had been *more wisely* done, to have left them in those circumstances. Nor is it any more inconsistent with *truth*, *justice*, or *holiness*.

BUT might not he have rectified these abuses, by calling them back to the *law of nature*, and shining in upon their minds with such *powerful light*, as should have set the whole *scheme* of natural duty, in plain and full light before them? and this accompanied with *such influence*, as should have brought them back into the path of duty? He *could*; and thus he can shine in on *every man's* mind. Must he therefore? why then is it not done? But, perhaps, this had not been so congruous to the *nature* of man, as a *free creature*; nor therefore so suitable to *divine wisdom*. And, perhaps, something *more* was requisite, than thus rectifying men's sentiments and reforming their manners. Perhaps both were to be done, in a way *more accommodate* to their nature and state. And God's dislike of sin, and *displeasure* against it, and the odious *nature* and *demerit* of it, were to be shewn, in a way that should fix a deep

deep *sense* of this in the minds of men, and raise the most hearty *hatred* of it, and most powerfully withhold them from it, by displaying at the same time the *riches* of God's *grace* to offending creatures, as will hereafter more fully appear.

It seems not therefore an *unreasonable* supposition, that God should communicate *his* mind to men, in these circumstances, in a way *supernatural*. And if *positive* rites are not absurdities in themselves, men's circumstances may render them *fit* and *gracious* institutions. Nor is there any thing *wild* or *visionary*, in supposing both *may be* from God. Without such a supposition indeed, no revelation, whether *true* or *false*, could have been received as coming from God. But this notwithstanding, if such revelation *may be*, and may be *known* satisfactorily to be from God, it is no argument against it, that there have been *false ones*. Whether christian revelation, may be known to have *this* original, has been before considered.

WHEN he therefore adds, if there are not *certain tests* flowing from the nature of things, &c. Admit it. It has been shewn above, that there are *such tests* obvious to all capacities, who make *due* enquiry, to distinguish *true* revelation from *false* ones. Who supposes that *reason* is not to be used about *matters of religion*? or that a revelation is to be received, on *the word* of any deceiver or madman? A revelation, that, to every man's *unprejudiced* reason, plainly appears to be *unworthy* of God, is not to be acknowledged for divine, should *miracles* be wrought to procure it credit. But a revelation that appears *worthy* of God, if attested by various and undoubted miracles, and published by men, concerning whom, we have the highest *probability*, if not *demonstration*, that they neither were, nor could be either silly *visionaries* or cunning and wicked *impostors*, is reasonably to be received

as

as divine. Whether christian revelation be not such, has been already considered. And that the few positive institutions in it, will not prove it unworthy to be from God, has, in this section, been sufficiently made to appear. But,

Sixtly, He suggests, that positives in their religion, put christians into a worse state than those who are under no law, but that of nature; that is, in his sense, *heavens*. If we suppose, says ^a he, any arbitrary commands (that is, positive) we put christians in a worse state, than those only under the law of nature. Christians will hardly take his word for it. Why so? "because such hazard not God's favour by mistakes and omissions in such matters." But admit they run no such hazards, yet if the advantages accruing from this revelation, be more than a ballance for these hazards, the christian's, on the whole, is the better state. If his duty be made more fully known, if enforced by more powerful motives, if set in an amiable light in the most perfect example, and made more practicable by peculiar helps, 'tis fit that the wilful neglect or non-improvement of such advantages, should expose to peculiar punishment. ¹ He who knows his master's will and does it not, shall be (justly) beaten with many stripes. Especially when, if he improves his advantages, he will have a felicity in proportion. In this I see nothing absurd or incongruous. But

"To suppose some men, says ^a he, who exactly obey the law of nature, may yet be punished eternally for not obeying another law, would be to make God deal infinitely less mercifully with them, than with those who are under no other Law." Is this strange supposition the effect of mistake, or known misrepresentation? Who ever was wild enough to make it? Where do these men live, who pay

pay exact obedience to the law of nature? Not among christians sure, who understand it so little, as to admit *positive rites* into religion. Sure, according to his own account, the supposition of such people among christians, is very *unnatural*. But in truth, there is no man living who *exactly* obeys the law of nature, whether under or not under *another law*. Such have no concern in the gospel-revelation. It is the *perfection* of that law, and the *imperfection* of all mankind, that make the *remedial law* so merciful a constitution. And though men be made liable hereby to *eternal misery*, for *wilful* disobedience to such additional laws (and none other, as has been observed, is *dammning*) this will not prove that God deals *less* mercifully, much less *infinitely less* mercifully with *those* under the gospel, than with *those* under the meer law of nature, if any such there be. But *much more* mercifully, as they have much *clearer* discoveries of God's love to sinful man by *Jesus Christ*, and his readiness to forgive sins for *his sake*, and many other *advantages*, as has been shewn just before.

“AND as to *temporal* happiness, says he, these (viz. under the law of nature only) are upon the *best foot*, as having nothing required of them, but what tends, as *they see*, to their good, and are free from all *panic fears*.” Means he, as one would think the argument requires, that nothing is required of *them*, but what *they see* is for their *temporal* good? Is nothing inconsistent with *this* good, required of *them* under the *meer* natural law? Is *virtue* never inconsistent with *this*? or will regard to the law of nature never expose a man to any *temporal* evil? What a fool then was *Socrates*, by common vote almost, the wisest and best man among the *philosophers*? he thought that, for the sake of *virtue*, even *temporal life* should be renounced. But *our philosopher*, it seems, would have taught him better.

better. The law of nature requires nothing from any, but what, *they see* is for their temporal good. Whereas *Socrates* * tells the *Athenians*, a very civil and polite people, and among whom the practice of his law of nature, was much inculcated, "That
 " a man can hardly be safe, who *honestly* sets him-
 " self to oppose *injustice* and *vice*, neither among
 " *their* people or *any* else." And other *heathen* mo-
ralists make like complaints.

BUT were this fact, *christians* must have the advantage of *heathens*, because they more fully understand the laws of nature, having them more fully made known to them by revelation, and much more powerful motives to their performance.

AND though *christians* are bound to seek the welfare of *themselves*, their *family* and *country*, yet temporal good is what they are taught to flight, in comparison of what is *eternal*, and to have their eye and heart fixt on heaven, where only their happiness will be compleat. And herein they have the advantage of those under the *mere* law of nature, as having more powerful motives to practise their duty under any discouragement, that they may not comply with *wicked* men in *professions* and *practices*, which reason and conscience condemn, which, as *this author* tells us, the *free-thinking* few, in most countries, are forced to do. And why forced; but from a preference of temporal good, to the dictates of reason and conscience? and how necessary is a prevailing regard to future happiness, to over-power this temptation? and what an advantage is it to a *christian*, by his heavenly hopes, to be made so indifferent to all worldly interests, that they may not be a temptation too strong for him to encounter

* Οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν ὅστις ἀνθρώπων σὺνίσταται, οὐτὲ ὑμῖν οὐτὲ ἀλλὰ ἑδνὶ πλὴθει γνησίως ἐναρπύμενος, καὶ διακούμενος πολλὰ ἄδικα καὶ κακὰ ἀντιπαρὶ τῆς γιγνόμενης. Plat. Apol. Socrat.

and overcome, in the faithful discharge of his duty? The christian's *trials* may be more sharp, and his *temporal* interests in more danger, than those of a virtuous heathen, though *he* must not expect to encounter *none*; but his *glorious hopes* are more than a ballance to this inconvenience, and vastly outweigh it. * *The sufferings of the present life, are not worthy to be compared with the glories that shall follow.* Therefore can he * *glory in tribulation, and rejoice when he is counted worthy to suffer for Christ's sake.* So far is he from accounting this to his disadvantage, though it were obedience to a *positive command* for which he suffers. Nor does he reckon it to the advantage of an *heathen*, to be freed from *panic fears*. And what are *these*? Why

Seventhly, He would insinuate, that those who think *positive* things belong to religion, * *are liable to constant doubts and fears on their account.* " Those, " says * he, who think things positive belong to religion which reason discovers not, nor how they are " to be performed, must be under *endless* doubts " and fears, and, according to the *measure* of their " superstition, be wrought upon, by designing " men to hate, damn and persecute one another, " about *such observances*. As is actually done, " every where by the different sects, who are so " *absurd*, as to believe a God of infinite wisdom and " goodness, can give his creatures *arbitrary* (i. e. " *positive*) *commands*." The connexion here looks somewhat odd. 'Tis strange those who *must* be under endless doubts and fears *themselves*, should yet be so peremptory as to damn *others*, for observances different from their own. One would think persons should be *out of doubt* themselves, e'er they can be thought upon, in this manner, to treat *others*. But why *must* they be under these doubts and fears? If

* Rom. viii. 18. * Ch. v. iii. * Acts v. 31.

* Page 109, 110.

revelation discovers the rites, describes them, and shows *how* they are to be performed; or if there be any thing not plain, is there no allowance, under revelation, for *involuntary* mistakes? But he *elsewhere* tells us, "The commands of the gospel, concerning these positives, are all involv'd in *obscurity*. Whereas if merely positive things are required, they must be as plain, as infinite wisdom *could make* them. And that they might be perverted to no ill purpose, we should have been told *when, how* and by *whom* they were to be applied, as well as that they are to be *for ever* obligatory."

I SUPPOSE the obscurity he complains of, regards these circumstances, *when, how*, and by *whom* these rites are to be applied. Now as to this matter, I confess I see no such difficulty. *How* baptism is to be administred, whether by *immersion*, or *effusion*, or *asperision* of water, is in my account of no great importance, whilst it is performed for the right ends in *the name of the father, son, and holy spirit*, and sets forth our obligation to repentance from dead works, faith in a dying Saviour, and to die, revive, and live with him. How the *other sacrament* is to be administred, is exceeding plain in the *institution*: *Bread* is to be broken, the *liquid* is to be poured out, *both* are to be distributed, taken, eaten, or drunk. What is there of difficulty here? if it be not determined in *what posture* this is to be done; no particular posture is certainly necessary. And if there has been a *dispute* about the meaning of the words, *this is my body*, does this make their meaning either dark or difficult? Should one in a *bookseller's shop* take up *Christianity as old as the creation*, and say to another, here is Dr. T—l for you, in a fine *new suit*, all bedaubed with *gold*; would any one, in his wits, imagine he meant the grave, old *civilian*, in his bodily presence,

sence, in such a flaunting and taudry dress? And when *Jesus took bread, and blessed and brake, and said, this is my body broken for you, and that whilst his very body was yet unbroken, could any one, in his senses, take him to mean that this was his very body?* Or any thing more than a *symbol* or *representative* of it? Is not this meaning much more plain, natural and obvious than the other?

AND what means he by, *when they are to be applied, at what season of the year, at what hour of the day?* There was no need this should be determined. Or means he at *what age of life?* in infancy, or only when persons are grown; christians having practised differently and been in different sentiments on this head, with regard to *both sacraments?* Certain it is, that those grown up to a due measure of understanding, can only have these rites applied to them, so as *fully* to answer *their ends*. But why *infants* may not be outwardly owned as members of Christ's *visible church*, and the *visible family of God*, and take upon them the badge by which *such* are distinguished, and eat *the food* of the family; I see nothing in scripture or reason to make out. If *parents* or *teachers* neglect to make the reasons and ends of these rites known to them, as they grow up, this is *their faults*. And if they are negligent in the instruction of their children in *natural duty*, much of this will be both unknown and neglected. Nor do I see, why christians may not *differently* practise on this head, with mutual forbearance, and without *quarrelling*.

AND as to the *persons* by whom they are applied, some *one* must do it; who more fit for this purpose, than *he* who ministers to the community in *holy things?* If *ambitious priests* have started difficulties about this matter, and talk of powers to be derived through *certain bands* in continued succession from *the apostles*, without which, *none* have a right to

apply these rites, the silence of scripture as to this matter, I should think, should silence those pretensions. Had such a stress been to be laid, on such a conveyance of power, infinite wisdom and goodness would have plainly told it us in the institution. But neither such stress is to be laid on the rite itself and much less on the administrator, as needs breed any such doubts and fears in christians minds. These outward rites separated from the internal christian life and temper, will stand none in any stead. And where christians feel their hearts affected in them, their minds improved by them, and their lives bettered, they need give themselves no concern about the powers of the administrator. The divine Power and Blessing accompanies them, and that is enough. And

It is Christ himself who calls any to this office, and truly gives the power, be it what it will. It is not a power to lord it over the flock, but minister to them, and be ensamples of all christian virtues. And whoever has a truly devout and christian spirit, leads an exemplary life, is apt to teach, finds himself disposed to take the office and discharge the duties of it, and has an opportunity for such service put into his hands, has all the essential requisites, and is called of Christ to the office. All beyond this is a meer point of order. And if for the sake hereof, he offers his qualifications to the trial of others, I cannot, nor never could see, why presbyters of equal piety and abilities with bishops, may not be as proper judges of those qualifications. Nor why, in many cases, the people themselves may not be such judges. I cannot but think the protestant ministers in France, &c. were as truly and regularly made ministers of Christ, as acceptable to God, and as useful in his church, as those ordained by popish bishops. And that the people

who, by the corruptions of *popery*, found themselves obliged to separate from *that church*, had a right to worship God publicly, and chuse, from *among themselves*, the *best qualified* to minister to them, and were not bound to forbear all such worship, or perform it without ministers, till some *popish* bishop was in good humour enough to lay *his hands* on them, or was himself a convert to *protestantism*. And the best way for any *ministers* to gain esteem, and have the genuine honour due to *their character*, is not by *exorbitant claims* of power, but an humble, faithful, diligent *application* to their work, and sincere endeavours to *honour God*, and make *men* truly virtuous and religious. And he who in this manner, *best discharges* his duty, is the *best minister*, whether *ordained* or not ordained, or ordained by *presbyters* or *bishops*, whether *hands* were laid on him, or not laid, whether called to the office by *ministers* or *people*. And this according to Christ's declaration, that *false prophets were to be known by their fruits*. The *sheep's* name and garb may disguise a while the *ravenous wolf*, but changes him not into a *sheep*. So that these *mighty difficulties*, when duely considered, need create but *little trouble* and concern.

AND suppose "men may be wrought upon, according to the measure of their superstition, to *bate, damn and persecute* one another:" this is but an accidental abuse. Neither the *rites* themselves, nor the *revelation* enjoining them, are answerable for it. It is owing to *superstition*, which has abused the religion of *nature*, as well as *revelation*. And till it be *rooted out* of men's hearts, it will continue to abuse them both. If *this author* could find out a method to do this, he would do much more service, by communicating it to the world, than by uttering such writings, as, *Christianity as old*, &c. But when he adds, "the common
" *practice*

the practice of all who are so absurd, as to think the infinitely wise and good God can give arbitrary (positive) commands to his creatures." It is acknowledged this has been too common a practice among christians as well as others. They too often hate and persecute, and hurt one another for their different sentiments, terms and forms. But this is not the fault of their religion, but their own. It is their sin, and their reproach. The contrary conduct is plainly required by their religion; and the rites enjoined by it, have no natural counter-tendency, but are certainly fitted in themselves to promote another spirit. And against this humour he may inveigh, as vehemently and successfully as he can: I wish well to his attempt. But let him not make the misbehaviour of those who profess it, an argument against christianity.

To hereticate, schismaticate, and damn one another, it must be owned, is, in a manner, peculiar to christians. Heathens had too imperfect and uncertain notions of a future state, in this manner to shew mutual hatred. But, if he be consistent with himself, there is no necessity that those who think God may enjoin positive rites, should hate and persecute one another. He tells us from a noble author, "that among the ancient heathens, superstition and enthusiasm were mildly treated, and, being let alone, they never raged to occasion wars, bloodshed, persecutions, &c." Who were these wise ancients? had they no positive observances in religion? Or none of pretended divine institution? Or were superstition and enthusiasm then more harmless things, than since christianity was in the world? Or did ancient christians find this mild treatment among heathens? Or were they more ancient heathens that treated superstition so mildly? It will be found upon enquiry, that it was not
 U their

their wisdom, but their *superstition*, that occasioned this mild usage. Even the ancient *Romans*, commonly adopted the Gods of those they conquered, and made *them free* of their city, as well as the people who worshipped them. And

Does he not ² elsewhere tell us, "The *Pagan* priests are scarcely taken notice of in story, so little mischief did they do." Had *these* no rites of pretended *divine institution*? And yet do so little mischief? Why then is this pronounced the *common practice* of all who are so absurd? Or is this *all* meant only of *all christians*? Is there any thing in christian rites, that *peculiarly* prompts to this? Or is there *such stress* laid on them in the revelation? Has God himself bound their observance on us on pain of *damnation*? If not, what *authority* have men, or what should prompt them, to *hereticate*, &c. on their account? Does he not account ¹ himself for *all* the mischief done in the christian world, by the *priests* claiming an *independent power*? "The *christian morals*, says he, are too *pure* and plain to occasion this difference, (in the mischief done by *pagan* and *christian priests*.) And he might have added, so are their *rites* too. "What then can it be imputed to, but that *independent power*, these (*christian*) *priests* have usurped? " ³ They scrupled no methods to obtain this power. And when they got it, an *intolerable tyranny* over the souls and bodies of men, was the consequence." This, it must be owned, is but too true. And hence it is much more fair to account for christians *damning, hating and persecuting* one another, than their absurdity in admitting *rites of divine appointment*, in their religion.

AND why must all men be called *absurd*, who admit that a God of infinite wisdom and goodness, may give *such commands*? Whether they are or no, has

² Page 93.¹ Ibid.³ Page 94.

has been considered. But it is, one would think, somewhat arrogant, in one so often out in his principles, and wrong in his consequences, to talk in a manner so dictatorial. *He is the man, no doubt, and wisdom must die with him.* A little more modesty, with stronger reasons, would have better become such a master of reason, and better have served his cause, if it be worth serving.

BUT as he is sure, that if positive rites are instituted of God, the how, when, by whom they are to be applied must be as plainly made known, as God can do it; and leave no room for mistake, difference, debate: so he here advances a step farther, "Were there any thing besides morality, says he, necessary to constitute true religion, we may be certain, the goodness of God would give us a demonstration for it, equal to what he has given us for morality." What means he by necessary to constitute true religion? Christian religion had all properly essential to it, had there been no positive institutions. These don't properly enter into its constitution, though they are useful annexa. They are means of religion, rather than religion itself. Perhaps no rites are necessary to true religion. It may be without them, if God sees fit. But if for wise and kind ends, he has annexed such to the christian constitution, must we have demonstrative evidence for this, e'er we submit to them, and this equal to what we have for morality? If we have the same evidence for the institutions as for the revelation itself, one would hope, that is sufficient. If this be not demonstrative, yet if it be such as should satisfy any reasonable man, engage his assent, and put him upon action, to desire more were utterly unreasonable. And sure, two such simple rites as those of the gospel, could we see no plain tendency in them to our good, should be no less to any reasonable man's receiving

receiving so excellent a religion as from God. But when they are manifestly fitted and designed to *promote* true religion, even that of reason and nature in its *highest* and *fullest* sense; what should insinuate, that they are unworthy of God. They have nothing in them *inconsistent* with either his wisdom or goodness, but are proper manifestations of both.

AND why should *demonstration* be insisted upon in the case? how comes he to be *certain* that God would give such evidence for them if they were enjoined? That is, he is *very sure*, God would give *such* evidence for them, as they *cannot* have. And *certainly* and *assurance* stand often with him for reason and argument. But how comes he to be thus certain? Is *nothing* to be admitted into religion, its constitution at least, no not by *any* man, till he can see demonstration for it? Has not *every* man as much *right* to a demonstration for religion as *he*? Or must what is demonstration *with him* pass upon all mankind for such? Is not this assuming beyond all the *priests* in *Christendom*, one only excepted? But if *every* man must have *every* thing of *this sort* demonstrated to him, how far will the obligations of the *natural law* reach among mankind? But a little way, I doubt. If *morality* be, in all its branches, demonstrable, it is to be feared, but *few* amongst mankind are capable of seeing the demonstration.

BUT any who have read *his book* impartially, will hardly think he deals *fairly* with christianity, by insisting on demonstration for it and its *rites*. Somewhat *vastly short* of demonstration will serve with him for *irreligion*, at least for discarding every thing in religion besides *thankfulness* to God for his benevolence to mankind, and an imitation of it in loving one's country. Whether this be a fair way of proceeding with religion, or indeed *themselves*, these enemies to revelation and religious rites, would do well to consider. *Christians* can see nothing *unworthy* of

of God in the gospel-institutions; and think they have good evidence, that their revelation is divine, and their rites are of the same original, nor see any reason why they should insist on strict demonstration, for what is not capable of it. Whether *they* or *unbelievers*, act the more manly and reasonable part as to *themselves*, or more dutiful towards God, is left to the unprejudiced sense and judgment of mankind.

THESE are the main things he has to object, against *positive rites* in religion, and christianity upon their account. Some other things he has to say, but hardly worth regard. As when he talks of *indifferent things* contributing to the perfection of religion, and thence infers, "That then there may be *endless* revelations, and the *last* always *best*, as having *new positives*." Whether he be here in *jest* or *earnest*, I can hardly tell. The *perfection* of a revelation, consists in answering the *ends* for which it was given. A revelation designed for *all mankind*, is perfect, if it contains a perfect account of every thing requisite for them to *know* and *practise*, in their circumstances, and *answerable* to all their wants. If such a revelation will, *without* any positive rites, answer all these purposes, and God sees fit to institute *none* such, the religion is *perfect* without them. But if God, in condescension to human frailties, and the better to accommodate religion to mens *circumstances*, thinks fit to add such *positive rites*, and these *all* he thinks proper; it is *more* perfect, *that is*, more compleatly fitted to answer its end, *with them*: and as perfect, as it needs to be. And supposing this, why *must* there be *endless* revelations? May not *one*, with a few such rites, fully answer the ends of revelation? And what room then for any more? But when he adds, "And the last always *best*, as having *new positives*," is

"this arguing or trifling?" Who is there, that thinks a religion valuable *merely* or *chiefly* on account of *positive* rites? or instituted *only* to gratify men with *new* ones, when weary of the *old*? Is this arguing with christians, as men? Or supposing them children, to be entertained with a *raile* or an *olly-borfe*?

Much of a piece with this, is what he* elsewhere says, "If there be nothing in religion, which comes from God, but what is *most excellent*, what room can there be for *indifferent* things? Can things *without* worth and excellency, contribute to that of religion? Then the more they abound, the *more* excellent would it be." Does this author always heed what he writes? Has true religion in his own account nothing in it but *superlatives*? Nothing but what is *most excellent*? Are there not in the law of nature, some things *more*, and some *less* excellent? Can nothing come from God but what is *most excellent*? Who then was maker of the *less* excellent creatures? And why may not laws, in several degrees of excellency, proceed from the *most perfect* law-giver, as well as works of different excellency from the most perfect maker?

But let us, instead of *most excellent*, put only *excellent*. What now, is excellent; but in other words, *what excels*? Can there be nothing in religion but what *excels*? Excels *what*? Every thing *indifferent*? "If there be nothing in religion, but what *excels* what is indifferent, can there be any room for things *indifferent*?" No certainty. But this is no more, than to say, if you'll yield his point, he'll be sure to carry it. If you'll admit, that *nothing* can be in a religion from God, but what is *better* than indifferent things, then there can be no such things in such a religion. Or are we to understand him of what *excels* every thing of the

same

same kind. This brings us back to his most excellent again. Then God can make *no* laws, but the very *best* that can be made, and that in every instance? If this be meant *absolutely*, he can only make laws about the very best and most important things. If only of the *best* that can be made relating to the *same* matter, this will not conclude that God may not command positives; but only that if he does, he must command *the best* of the sort. I doubt *himself* hardly knows the force of this reasoning. But sure where in things themselves there is *different* excellency, laws adjusted to the *nature* of things, must have different measures of excellency. And ritual laws may have their *proper* excellency, as well as those, in *his* sense, founded in reason and the nature of things. But when he adds, "Can things of *no* " worth or excellency, contribute to *that* of religion?" No. But why must rites in religion be perfectly *worthless* things? As far as they are of *use*, they have their *worth*. And if by means of them, a religion becomes more accommodate to the circumstances of mankind, and the *better* fitted to reach its ends, so far they may contribute to its excellency; since a religion less fitted to answer its ends, must in this respect have less excellency. But supposing a religion, in the sense explained, *more* excellent for the positive rites annexed, what then?

"THE more *they* abounded, the *more* excellent " would the religion be." This will by no means follow, but upon supposition that *these* rites were essential parts of the religion, adding to the excellency of it in itself. Whereas, they are supposed no other than *means*, in subserviency to an *higher* end. As the religion comprehends the duties both of the *means* and *end*, these have their use, in *their* place, and as such their worth, and may, so far, contribute to the excellency of religion, as fit means for such an end. But it by no means follows, that be-

cause they are thus far for the excellency of a religion, that the more *they* abound, the *more* excellent would the religion be. A few, plain rites may be of service, when a multitude would *encumber* religion, and instead of promoting what is inward and spiritual, would make it dwindle into empty *formality* and *lifeless shew*. Rites in religion are only valuable as means to an end. Where the end they *should* serve, is destroy'd by them, they are not only *useless*, but *hurtful*. Gaudy, pompous, ceremonies are apt to sensualize religion: a *multitude* smother it. Because as A. Bp. Tillotson, as he quotes him, observes, "That men have *less* leisure " to be good men, and mind the great and *substantial* " duties of the christian life, when taken up in a mul- " titude of such shewy and external observances." Yet *christians* cannot but think the *two* plain rites of the gospel, wisely and graciously adapted to human infirmities, and great helps towards making men *truly* and *thoroughly* religious. Such many have found them. And *he* will never, by *his* reasonings, persuade them to renounce their own *reason* and *experience*.

I HAVE now gone over every thing *material*, offered by him on *this* head, at least I have *wisfully* overlooked nothing that appeared so to *me*. The reader will judge, whether, what he has here offered, to the *prejudice* of christianity, has *weight* in it; and whether such a religion, because of the *few* *positive* institutions in it, is to be rejected as unworthy of God,

Sub §. IV. His Objections to Christianity, as *not being* universally *made known*, *considered*.

A **N**OTHER *objection* he makes to christianity, is, that it has not been made known to *all mankind*. A revelation from God, according to him,

him, is not to be limited to *time* or *place*. But in all times should be *equally* communicated to all people. This christianity has never been, nor now is. It cannot therefore be a revelation from God! But *his talk* on this argument, is groundless presumption against plain *fact*, and carried into its *just* consequences, must deny *all concern* of God with the world and humane affairs, if not terminate in downright *atheism*. God is *not* good, if a revelation from him be not *universal*. Yet nothing *new* is offered, but the same things advanced by him in proof of the *sufficiency* of the *light* of *nature*, and which have had their answer, come over again. But that he may have *no pretence* to say, the force of his arguments is, *this way*, evaded, let us attend him again.

“ If, says ^d he, the *design* of God in communicating any thing of himself to men, was *their* happiness, would not this have *obliged* him, who at *all* times alike desires their happiness, to have at *all* times alike communicated it to them? If God *always* acts for the *good* of his creatures, what reason can be assigned, why he should not from the *beginning*, have discovered *such* things as make for their good, but defer the doing it to the time of *Tiberius*? The sooner this was done, the *greater* would his goodness appear to be. Nay, is it *consistent* with infinite benevolence, to hide that for many ages, which he knew was as useful at first to *prevent*, as it could afterwards be to *put a stop* to, any thing he disliked. If God intended mankind the happiness their *nature* is *capable* of, he must at all times have given them the *means* of obtaining it, by the *rules* pre-tended for their conduct; and therefore these rules must at *all times* have been discoverable. For if he acts upon *rational motives*, must not the

“ same”

“ same motives which obliged him to discover any
 “ thing, that is for the good of mankind, have
 “ obliged him to discover *every* thing that is so,
 “ and that in the *same* plain manner? And not do
 “ this, as it were *grudgingly*, here a bit and there a
 “ bit, to one favourite nation only, under the veil
 “ of *types, allegories, &c.* and at last, though he
 “ discovered some things *there* plainly, yet but to
 “ a *small* part of mankind, the *bulk* remaining to
 “ this day in *deplorable* ignorance? ”

THESE two paragraphs contain, I think, all
 there is of argument on this head, in his book,
 though the same things often occur in *diversity* of
expression. And the answering what is here said,
 will be an answer to *all* he offers on this head.
 Though I shall remark on other passages, as I go
 on.

AND it is manifest, the *foundations* on which he
 builds here, are almost all *precarious* and *disputable*,
 and therefore can never support the superstructure
 he lays on. As

First, He supposes the *sole* design of God in cre-
 ating man, and communicating any thing of himself to
 men, was their happiness. How far this is right,
 has been * above considered. That man's happiness
 is the intention of his laws, both *natural* and *evan-*
gelical, and that they are manifestly fitted to this end,
 is very obvious from the frame of them. And that,
thus far, the happiness of mankind was God's inten-
 tion in governing them, is plain. But their hap-
 piness depending on their *obedience*, and they being
 made *free*, and therefore *peccable* creatures, and
 capable, by disobedience, of making themselves
 miserable, the intention of God's laws and God
 himself, must be here distinguished. For what
 God does *indeed* design, what can prevent? seeing
 his wisdom and power are infinite. Or how can in-
 finite

* Vid. Ch. 1. Page 4, 10, &c.

finite wisdom be said to *design*, what, from the very frame of man's nature, he knew might *never be*, and what the *event* of things plainly shews is not come to pass? The generality of mankind making themselves *miserable*, by disobedience to those laws, which were evidently framed to make them happy, at least in their *primary* intention.

Secondly, He supposes this design *must have obliged God at all times alike to desire the happiness of all mankind, and therefore at all times to communicate himself alike to them.* It is a pretty harsh term to say God is *obliged*. Proper obligation implies authority *superior*. This God, who is himself supreme, cannot be under: nor, therefore under proper obligation. But as he elsewhere explains himself, I am free that his *own sense*, should be put on his *own words*. What other reason have we, says he, to say, "God is *obliged* to do any thing whatever, but that it is *agreeable* to the natural notions we have of his *wisdom* and *goodness*, and the *dictate* of nature and reason for him to do." Understand him so here. And upon his *own Principle*, it is no *necessary* dictate of nature and reason, that God should at *all times* alike, desire the happiness of *all Men*, and communicate himself to them for *this purpose*. Supposing it the design of God to make *all men* happy, it may not be agreeable to wisdom and goodness, to make all men *equally* so: it is not *such* a dictate of nature and reason, as that this must be the effect, or God act *inconsistently* with wisdom and goodness; which he must mean by being *agreeable* to wisdom and goodness, or his argument concludes not. God may create men with *various* capacities for happiness, and where the natural capacities for it are *equal*, he may afford some *advantages* for being happy, more than he does to others, without doing any thing

thing *inconsistent* with any *natural* notions of his wisdom or goodness. Nay, it may appear *fit* to his infinite wisdom, that *such* differences should be made, even on supposition that it was his design to make all men happy.

AND it is plain in *fact*, that this is the case. All men are not *equally* favoured by him in the course of his providence. All men are not equally freed from the *inconveniencies*, nor blest with the *enjoyments* of life. Some are hail, and strong, and healthy; others of a weak and sickly constitution, wearing out life in almost continual pains. Some are forced to toil hard for daily bread, whilst others live at ease? Some are pinched with want, even of the necessaries of life, whilst others have an affluence of all earthly comforts. Are these outward enjoyments *no ingredients* into human happiness? Or where this difference is made, can God be said *equally* to desire the happiness of all mankind? Or, say the pleasures of *virtue* may *ballance* the account; is this ever the case? Are all the *poor* and *sickly*, thus virtuous and blessed, in proportion to their external disadvantages? If not, how then is God *alike* desirous, of the happiness of all men? How does he communicate himself to all *alike*.

BUT admit *this author* means that happiness, which depends on *virtue*, and a regard to the law of nature. Is God obliged at *all times* to communicate himself *alike* to all men, that they may be thus happy? How are *these* obligations reconcileable with the *common conduct* of providence? Has God communicated himself *as much*, or made *as much* of his mind known to this end, to *one Nation* as *another*? To every single person as to every other? To the *Hotentots* and *Savages* of *America*, as the old *Greeks* and *Romans*? Or to every one of *these*, as to *Socrates* and *Plato*, *Cato* or *Antoninus*? Or to every one of *these* last, as to the *Apostle Paul*?

If

If not, which every one, unless wilder than an *Enthusiast*, must allow, then, either God has *not* done according to *his obligations*, (if it be fit thus to speak) or else this *gentleman* is mistaken as to his obligations.

CERTAIN it is, even according to *himself*, that natural light is not thus *equally* communicated. A *peasant*, he says, is not capable of knowing as much as the *Rector* of *St. James's*. Then *one* has not as much of the light of nature, communicated to him, as *the other*: nor is *the one* as capable of happiness, as *the other*. For the more men *know* of their duty, the more they may *do*. And the more of that duty they do, the *greater* is their present enjoyment, and their future prospect of happiness. So that to suppose God under obligations to make *all* men, in *all* times and places happy *alike*, is either to contradict *universal* experience, or charge God with *not* doing what he is *obliged*. Which must infer, that, either he *knows not* what is agreeable to wisdom and goodness, and the dictates of reason and nature, as well as *this author*, or acts *without* any regard to them. I should think it were much more becoming him to suppose that he may *mistake* the dictates of reason and nature, and *mif-judge* as to what is agreeable to wisdom and goodness, than, in order to carry his *favourite* point, to *censure* and *reproach* the divine conduct.

Thirdly, HE supposes it *inconsistent* with divine goodness, not to use means to prevent evil, as well as put a stop to it. "Is it consistent, says he, with *finite benevolence*, to hide that for many ages, which he knew would be as useful to prevent, as to put a stop to it?" Which is in effect to say, that *infinite benevolence* must prevent *all* the evil, as well as do *all* the good it can. Accordingly he elsewhere introduces the *Indians*, as arguing against *Christians*; "Is not your God a good God, who
" loves

“ loves mankind ? Why does he then permit the
 “ devil to be continually doing such infinite mischief
 “ with us ? One who does not hinder a mischief
 “ when it is in his power, is thought not much
 “ better, than him who does it.” What is the natural
 consequence from hence ? But, that God is not
 much better than the devil. Whatever unknown
 mischief devils do, men do a great deal, and are
 suffered of God to do it. Is God therefore not
 much better than they ? Is this permission inconsistent
 with infinite benevolence ? And yet infinite bene-
 volence an attribute of deity ? What is the conse-
 quence, but that there is no such being ? And does
 not this author thoroughly understand the reason and
 nature of things ? Is he not a fit person, with de-
 monstrative evidence, to deduce the laws of nature
 from self-evident notions ?

God is bound, it seems, if he be not mistaken,
 to apply means for preventing evil rather than of-
 fering present remedies for its cure. His infinite
 benevolence binds to this. And for the same reason,
 effectual means, if such there be, as well as any means
 at all. God should, therefore, never have suffered
 any evil or harm to befall mankind, which was
 in his power to prevent, or he had effectual means
 to have done. Yet every one sees and knows, that
 much such evil and harm does befall mankind. If
 God cannot prevent it, this must be from ignorance
 of it, or want of power for the purpose. And
 how is this consistent with infinite power and
 wisdom, more than the voluntary permission of it,
 with infinite benevolence ? And take away these
 perfections, and where is deity ? And is there any
 force in an argument that leads to such a conclu-
 sion ?

INDEED, either there is no God, or God is
 not a good being, or else the permission of evil is
 consistent with infinite benevolence. Since God

has

has suffered, and continually suffers much evil in the world, without interposing to prevent it. Nor does infinite benevolence oblige him to afford all men means needful to avoid all evil. If men through abuse of their natural freedom, corrupt themselves, impair their natural powers, and render themselves inhabil for performing their duty, he is not bound to repair these powers, nor prescribe means for the remedy of this evil.

INDEED, it seems hardly reconcileable with infinite goodness, or even justice, to require from men, under pain of eternal misery, what, in their circumstances, is utterly impossible for them to perform; especially if their corruption and incapacity be not wholly owing to themselves. But if in this state, they are still, in some measure, in a capacity for happiness, and no more is requir'd of them than is some way within their power, infinite goodness can no more bind God to do more for them, than to make peasants philosophers, barbarians polite and civilized, or men angels. What is matter of mere bounty, may be dealt out in what proportions the giver pleases. If a man gives to one necessitous object a shilling, to another but sixpence, is he not therefore kind, because not equally kind? Perhaps he has reasons for making this difference, which I may not see. And may not Infinite wisdom have reasons for like diversity, that lie out of our reach? Or is the stress to be laid on the attribute infinite? Must infinite benevolence make equal distributions? And why must not infinite power, for the same reason, ever produce equal effects?

WHEN therefore he asks, "What reason can be assigned, why God should not from the beginning have discovered, or but defer it till the time of Tiberius?" Even supposing God ever to act for the good of his creatures in general, I would say this is a very impertinent question. What if no man

can assign the reason, must God therefore have no reason for this conduct? Has he no reasons for what he does, but what lie within *man's reach*? Is not this way of talking, rather making a God of one's self, than paying a *becoming* reverence, to the Supreme Being and his wisdom? Or is this argument, *I know* no reason for it, therefore there *can* be none, or none that is *good*? I know nothing this argues but my own arrogance and presumption. Are there not a *thousand things* in the world, for which no man living can account or assign a reason? Is it fit hence to infer, no account can be given? and thence, that they *cannot* be from a God of infinite wisdom and goodness.

AND must God, supposing him to act always for his creatures good, discover to them *all*, and at *all times*, *whatever* is, in any respect, for their good, the utmost good? How can this be made to consist with the *present* state of things, where so many amongst mankind are destitute of *such discoveries*? If not, why may it not be consistent with divine goodness to defer till the time of *Tiberius*, the full discovery of what makes so much for the good of mankind, as the christian revelation is supposed to do, by those who believe it? Surely, God's wisdom was the *proper* judge, of the *fit* time for *this* purpose.

THE full discovery, I say; because there were *hints* of such a dispensation as this under the gospel, even in the *earliest times*. As *Abraham* had a promise, that in his seed^a, all nations of the earth should be blessed, it looks, as if mankind in general, had the hint of such a blessing before, the general expectation being only in this promise made more *determinate*. It's plain from the *scripture-history*, that, before the flood^b, there was a distinction between beasts *clean* and *unclean*, not for food, the allowance

^a Gen. xxiii. 18.

^b Ch. vii. 2.

to eat flesh^k, being first given after the flood: For what then, but for sacrifice? ¹ Cain and Abel brought their offerings to God, and Noab, after the flood^m, built an altar and offered burnt-offerings. Hence it looks very likely, that sacrificing was originally of divine institution, though we have no particular account of it. And, that immediately upon the entrance of sin and guilt into this world, as God was pleased to provide a remedy, he instituted sacrifice, to prefigure and signify the manner, inⁿ which it was to be dispensed. To this, many of the Jewish sacrifices afterward, had plain references.

AND without some such traditional derivation of this usage, it is hardly to be accounted for. "Man-kind, as he rightly observes, must have very gross conceptions of the deity, to think him delighted with the butchering of animals (whether innocent or nocent) and that the stench of burnt-flesh, should be such a sweet savour in his nostrils, as to atone for the wickedness of men." This is, therefore, a much more probable account, of the original of sacrifices, than his ridiculous scrap of poetry, or his own suggestion, that it was originally nothing but a feast, "at a sheep-shearing, gathering in harvest, &c. in which thanks were given to God for his blessings, without burning or destroying any of them, where the master of a family, was master of the ceremonies; till certain persons, who were resolved to have the best share in them, persuaded the people, that it was necessary some part of the flesh of animals, should be burnt to feed the hungry nostrils of the deity, delighted with the sweet savour of burnt flesh, and the better part to remain unburnt for themselves, to whom the slaying and offering animals was

X

ap.

^k Gen. ix. 3. ¹ Chap. iv. 3, 4. ^m Ch. viii. 20.

ⁿ P. 78.

• Ibid.

"appropriated." Sometimes he represents the *heathen priests* as harmless creatures, that did little mischief: yet they were not *christian priests* who invented sacrifice. And the people must have been exceeding silly and credulous, or their priests must have had strange power over them, to get all the roast-meat and choice bits to themselves, on so senseless a pretence.

BUT the first account we have of sacrificing in history, suits very ill with his account of its original. The first sacrificers were either single persons, as Cain, and Abel, or masters of families themselves, as Noah, &c. Did the master of the family contrive this method to cheat the rest of roast-meat? Had he any need to play such tricks with them for this purpose? Was not this within his power, as master of the feast. And when masters of families were both masters of these feasts, and sacrificers too, how could certain other persons pervert in this manner the design of feasts, and turn them into sacrifices, and this by persuading them to believe that the hungry nostrils of the deity, were delighted with the sweet savour of burnt flesh? When was this order of men instituted? What room was there for them at such feasts? And how should sacrificing be owing to priestcraft, when sacrifices were offered e'er there were any priests? And what dupes were mankind, to be brought into such an usage, on the foot of such gross absurdity? A glorious confirmation of the sufficiency of the light of nature, to teach men the principles and use of the perfect law of nature, when all mankind, except a few complying freethinkers, were to be led by the nose, and persuaded to leave all the roast-meat to the priests, by so gross an imposition on the common sense of mankind, as that the deity was delighted with the sweet savour of burnt flesh.

BUT this is doubled over, to turn a scripture-expression into ridicule, if he could. God is said

said ^{to have} *smelled a sweet savour in Noah's sacrifice.* By which, with *allusion* to the sacrifice, is only meant, that God accepted the worshipper; as he is elsewhere said ^{to have respect to} *Abel, and his offering.* What creature living, endu'd with common sense, can put this *gross, literal* meaning on the phrase, and think that God smelt a *sweet savour* in the *burnt flesh*? But is every such *allusive* expression to be turned into ridicule? How many *beauties* in poetical and prosaic writing too, that have stood the *test* of the best *criticks*, and been the admiration of *all men*, may thus be turned into ridicule? And if he has a mind to make himself ridiculous, he may quickly do it, by picking out *some* of these beauties, and in the same manner making himself *merry* with them. Himself is here pleased, to talk of *feeding hungry nostrils* with scent. Let him try his talent, and see whether he can't find somewhat in this to be laugh'd at.

HIS account of the *original* of sacrifices, must appear very *unnatural* upon this state of the case. It is perfectly unaccountable, that *all nations* should be cozened by the *priests*, on so silly a pretence, into such an usage; nor is it easily to be accounted for, that there should be *any priests*, to be guilty of this cozenage. But if it was a *tradition* derived from some *first family*, to their posterity, it seems to have been an *institution* of God, to hint a more valuable *sacrifice*, in due time to be offered to God, for taking away sin, or more properly, *that bar* which stood in the way of its *free* pardon. Certain it is, that among the *Jews*, the hints of this kind were more particular. And by the *dispersion* of that people over the *east* and *west*, these hints were more generally, though but *obscurely*, propagated amongst mankind. And this prepared a way to the more *full discovery*, in the time which to divine wis-

X 2 dom

Gen. viii. 21.

Ch. iv. 4.

dom seem'd most proper. And if this was designed in their *dispersion*, that time could not long have preceded the reign of *Tiberius*. But somewhat of the gospel; and God's purpose to *relieve* and *redeem* mankind in their sinful state, seems to have been communicated to them in *this rite*, even as early as they needed this relief and redemption.

BUT however this were, *infinite goodness* binds not God, to deal out his favours to mankind, in just the *same measure*. He may be infinitely good in *himself*, and good to *all* mankind, and yet may make *some* of them capable of greater happiness, than *others*. For why may not *one* man, be made capable of greater happiness, than *another*, as well as an *angel* of more than *any* man, or a man more than any *inferior creature*? And why may not God then vouchsafe one greater *advantages*, *opportunities* and *helps* for it, than another?

WHEN he tells us, "That if God intended
" mankind (*i. e.* all mankind) the happiness, (*i. e.* the
" whole happiness) their *nature* was capable of, he
" must at all times, have given them the *means* of
" obtaining it, by the *rules* prescribed for their con-
" duct; and therefore *these* rules must, at all times,
" have been discoverable." This argument is
built, as has been shewn, on a very *precarious* sup-
position; but it concludes *much* short of what it
should. For certainly, if God *intended*, that all
mankind should enjoy the *whole* happiness, of which
man's nature is *capable*, not only *must* he, at all
times, have given them the *means* necessary for ob-
taining it, but must have made these means *effectual*.
And not only have made the *rules* of conduct ne-
cessary hereto *discoverable*, but have actually dis-
covered them, and more than that, have effectually
influenced *all* mankind, punctually to *observe* them;
since, without this, his purpose had been frustrated.
And since this is not the case in fact, our *author*
must

must be *wrong* in making this supposition, and taking it for granted.

BUT if he means no more, than that God *so far* intends the happiness of all mankind, as to make them capable of it, in the performance of *that* duty, he has given them means to discover and practise. I shall not dispute it with him. But the inference thence drawn, is by no means *just*. For this may be, though the discovery is in very *unequal* degrees, and the happiness consequent on the performance of *known* duty, is in measure very various. And then God may vouchsafe a revelation at *one* time, and to *one* nation or more, which he vouchsafes not to *all*, and at *all* times, and yet be *infinitely* and *absolutely* good.

Fourthly, He supposes, *that there is the same reason for God's discovering every thing that is for the good of mankind, as any thing.* And therefore says, "If God acts rationally, or on *rational motives*, he must have fully, and plainly, and at once made known to *all* men, and not, as he expresses it, "grudgingly, here a bit and there a bit, &c." This, one would think, is a little *too positive*. Had he contented himself with saying, *he* could see no reason, why *every* thing should not be discovered, as well as *any* thing, this might have been true. But must he see a reason for what God does, or arraign his wisdom? Suppose God ever acts on what he terms *rational motives*, or views that appear to him, and therefore must be *right* and *fit*; may not he who sees infinitely deeper into things, and their *fitnesses* and *relations* than *any* man can, judge many things fit for him to do, that *this* gentlemen understands not? And when he communicates to *all* mankind, all that is *necessary* to make them happy, if they *duly* improve the light they have; may he not yet think it meet, to discover *more* of what is for their good

to *some*, than *others*? May not he see a *fitness* in this, that does not stand in view to *this author*.

NAY, as has been already observed, the discovery of what is for the *good* of mankind, by natural light is made both to nations and particular persons, in *unequal* degrees. To say they may have *equal* knowledge, because *all* natural duties are discoverable by *natural* light, besides that it contradicts what *himself* says, will not mend the matter. For however discoverable, whilst they are *actually* undiscovered, *much* of what is for their good, compared with others, is *not* discovered to them. And how then is God obliged to discover *every* thing that is for their good, as well as *any* thing, if he acts on rational motives? But the *only* rational motive, with him, that must determine God to act, is the good of *all* mankind, and this *the* *bighest* of which man's nature is capable. And this being admitted, his inferences are *just*. But this is *begging*, not proving his point. Nor does he seem at all concerned, what *disbonour* this talk throws on God, nor how it is reconcileable with the *state* of mankind, nor *himself* in other places.

BUT if there may be such different discoveries made by *natural* light, and yet God act on *rational* motives, why may not like difference be made by *revelation*? and one *favourite* nation be blest at one time, and several at *another* time, with such as *others* enjoy not, but remain *comparatively* in deplorable ignorance? If they are not bound down to *inevitable* misery, if they are in capacity of happiness, what reason have they of *complaint*? God is not *so* good to them as to others. But must God be *equally* good to *all* his creatures, or all of the *same* species, if he be good at all? Or must men *repine*, and charge him with defect in goodness, because not *equally* favoured with others of their kind? Cannot God be infinitely good, unless he make *every* being
of

of the same kind, as happy as he *can*, and that without any difference? There is nothing in the reason or nature of things to countenance such a supposition. Nor therefore to lay him under obligation, if he would always act on rational motives, to make equal discoveries, of what is for their good, to all men. Infinite wisdom may see much reason for making a difference, if *this author* does not.

THE rest of his discourse on *this head*, is little else but talking over again, what has been now considered. But that he may not complain, that any thing which has the face of argument, has been overlooked; let us attend him a little farther.

“IF, says he, *external revelation be necessary* to the happiness of mankind, how is it consistent with the notion of God’s being a *benevolent Being*, not to have vouchsafed it to all *his children*, when all had *equal need*? Was it not as easy to have communicated it to *all nations*, as to *any one* person or nation? Or in *all languages*, as in *any one*? Nay, was it not as easy for him to have made *all nations* speak *one language*, as to multiply languages to prevent the *building a tower up to heaven*? Nay, God has no need of *any language*, to make known his will to men, since he has, at *all times*, communicated his will *without it*.” But what means he, by revelation being *necessary* to the happiness of mankind? Should it be allowed that this is *absolutely necessary* to their compleat felicity, yet considering, that by sin, they have forfeited *this happiness*, he can never prove it *inconsistent* with divine goodness, to deny such a revelation to mankind. But supposing it *not absolutely necessary*, to their enjoying some degree of happiness, both present and future, or that every thing that is *so*, has been communicated to mankind; that is, God’s being *favourable* to sinful men, hinted in the

general intention of sacrifice, whilst he requires nothing of any man, in order to happiness, but what may be known to him and praised by him; there is no room to impeach divine benevolence, though he makes their duty, and his own kind purposes, more fully known to some than others. This is no more inconsistent with his being a benevolent being, than the distinction he makes amongst men in outward privileges, inward endowments, capacities of mind and advantages for learning, civility, good manners or virtue? If all his children (which yet were offending children too) had equal need of a revelation, yet if all needful to happiness was made known to them, and they were in a capacity to obtain it, he might use his pleasure, surely, in favouring some with a revelation, that would have put them into a capacity of greater happiness than others. No earthly parent thinks himself bound, in order to his being a good parent, to impart his benefits equally to all his children.

No doubt is to be made, but God could have communicated his mind to all nations, as well as to any one, and in all languages as well as in any one. But how an external revelation should have been made without any language, is not so easy to understand. He could also if he pleased have made men speak all one language, as at first they did. But he had wise and good purposes to serve by multiplying them. And as long as he could easily furnish his ministers with a faculty of speaking all languages, it amounts to the same thing. God wanted no power to communicate his mind to men, but what is this to his purpose? Must he have exerted his power to this purpose, or not be good? This is left to the reader.

BUT I suppose this talk, was for the sake of turning the scripture story into a jest, that makes the building a tower, an occasion of dividing the languages.

guages. At this he had a sting before, suggesting that the *divine writer* was ignorant of the *necessary* variety of languages, on the increase of mankind. But how ignorant soever the *divine writer* were; *this writer* seems often to forget himself. For if variety of language was *necessary* on the increase of mankind, how should God make them all speak one language? For that he speaks of a variety *natural* and *necessary*, and not the result of positive constitution, his argument shews. And tho' he had no respect for the character of a *divine writer*, he might have been more modest than to suggest so pitiful a reason for lessening it. A man of *Moses's* education and endowments, might have been supposed to know as well as himself, what was necessary in this matter on the increase of mankind, without derogating from *his* worth or understanding.

THE manifest purpose of the *history* is to give an account of the *dispersion* of mankind, when they were originally *one family*, and spake *one language*. How proper was it, that, for this purpose, they should have their language divided? This made *parting* necessary. And that those who spake one language should *herd* together, and settle where they should meet with a place convenient. And what is there *improper* in the occasion of thus diversifying their language. Out of vanity, they would *build a tower that should reach to heaven*. If God is pleased to baffle this attempt, and set it forth as a *ridiculous* undertaking, which he could frustrate at pleasure, what is there herein that is *unfit*. And what else does what is said amount to? *This they begin to do, and now nothing will be restrained which they have imagined to do.* (They'll not withhold their hands from any thing, to which they are prompted by the *vanity* of their hearts.) Go to, let us go down and there confound their language; or, by diversifying

^c P. 228.

^c Gen. xi. 4, 5, 6, 7, &c.

Bying their language, throw them into confusion, and quite confound their design. Immediately whereon God is said to have scattered them over the face of the earth. And then the divine writer goes on to shew, the several quarters of the world, to which they were directed. And it is the most antient and authentic account of this matter, to be met with in history. But says he again,

“ If God does every thing fit for him to do, can
 “ the greatest part of mankind be in deplorable cir-
 “ cumstances, for want of a revelation; which,
 “ out of his infinite wisdom, he has not yet thought
 “ fit to communicate to them, or not with evidence
 “ sufficient to make them believe it? Must not this
 “ suppose, that, either God, in creating mankind,
 “ did not design their happiness, or else prescribe
 “ such means, or gave such rules, as, either were
 “ not sufficient at first, or in process of time be-
 “ came insufficient for that end? But after men had
 “ been for many ages in this deplorable condition,
 “ God thought fit to mend the eternal, universal
 “ law of nature, by adding certain observances,
 “ not founded in the reason of things, and out of
 “ his partial goodness, to communicate those only
 “ to some, leaving the rest in their dark deplora-
 “ ble state.”

In how deplorable a state of ignorance and misap-
 prehension, about religion, of superstition and idola-
 try, the heathen world was heretofore, and is to this
 day, from the Hotentots and Savages in America, to
 the polite Chinese; is known to those, who know
 any thing of these matters. That this is owing to
 the want of revelation, is his misrepresentation of the
 matter. A revelation may be necessary to cure it,
 but the want of a revelation did not cause it. Man's
 corruption, abuse of liberty, sin, vices, neglecting
 to attend to, and follow the light and law of nature,
 loose education, evil communication, bad example,
 &c.

Ec. were the proper *causes*. If a man, by lewdness and debauchery, brings ruin on his estate, and *rottenness into his bones*, he can't be said to be in this state for want of remedy and relief. He is in this state for his own misconduct, though *without* remedy and relief he is likely to *continue* in it. This case is somewhat parallel. Nor will he be able to prove, that to leave men in a state of ignorance and corruption, brought on by *their own fault*, is inconsistent with divine goodness. But if in this state, they had any hints of mercy from God, were still capable of a *measure* of felicity, and nothing was required from them beyond what was *some-way* in their power to *know* and *do*; God certainly dealt kindly by them. Nor was divine benevolence *obliged* to communicate farther knowledge to them, unless it obliges God to make *every* creature as happy as he makes *any* one, and communicate a degree of knowledge not only *sufficient*, but *effectual* to this end. Whether this be reasonable to assert, has been considered already.

God may therefore *do all that is fit for him to do*, and yet vouchsafe a revelation to *some* people; which he affords not to *others*; but when he adds, or "not with evidence sufficient to *make* them believe it," he seems to intimate, that a revelation must carry such evidence, as will *constrain* assent. As elsewhere he insists on *demonstration* for it, which does constrain assent. And what can be the consequence, from hence? but, that if God *does what is fit for him to do*, he must vouchsafe a revelation, to *all* mankind, at *all* times and in all places, sufficiently evident to *constrain* assent, at least if he vouchsafes *any* at all? And why not to *necessitate* compliance too? since *this* is as necessary to human happiness, as knowledge of *duty*? Must not his argument, if it has any force, carry him *this length*? And if it can be made appear, that a
reve-

revelation *has* been made to *some* people, what is the consequence, but that God does not *what is fit for him to do*? Nay, even supposing no such revelation was ever made, will not this prove that God does not *what is fit for him to do*? Since even natural light is not communicated in this *measure and manner* to all men, unless all men *actually* yield all that obedience to the law of nature, which is *due* from them, at least in order to happiness? Which to assert, would be to fly in the face of *universal* experience, and, in contradiction to his *own* scheme, leave no room for the *kind, intolerable* sufferings of a future life.

Nor, when men, through *abuse* of liberty, had corrupted themselves, and *darkened* the light of nature, does it at all imply the *imperfection* or *insufficiency* of the *rules* originally given for mens conduct, or the *means* prescribed to bring them to happiness, that a revelation was given of God, to help men *hither* to understand and practise natural duty. And his talk of God's *mending* the eternal, universal law of nature, is either an *impertinent* or *invidious* representation of the matter. This law needed no *amendment*. It was a perfect rule of life as far as intended; and much *too perfect* for mankind, in their corrupted state, exactly to observe. And this made a *remedial* constitution *fit*, and indeed *necessary* to man's obtaining complete happiness. Not, because the original law was *imperfect*, but because *man's* imperfection rendered *exact* obedience to it impossible; and not a man upon earth lives without *manifest* deviations from it. And every thing added to it, is not in *derogation* from the law's perfection, but in kind *condescension* to human infirmity and imperfection. And it is much more *becoming* imperfect creatures, to be *thankful* for such mercy, than from a proud conceit of their *own* understanding and abilities, make the *perfection* of the law

law of nature, which they *cannot* fulfil, an argument against it. What he says of the adding certain observances not *founded in reason*, has been considered in the foregoing *section*.

WHAT he means by *partial* goodness, I cannot understand, unless no goodness can be, but what does good to all beings *alike*, and no being who is good, is at liberty to act *otherwise*. Which to maintain, is certainly *one* *revery*, to which revelation contributes nothing. If a man supplies the *necessitous*, as far as to *him* seems fit, may he not more *abundantly* supply *one* than *another*, without forfeiting his character for goodness? nay, supposing them *alike* related to him, and in *equal* want? But if he be not so much master of his own favours, he has no *freedom*, there is no room left him for *choice*. He must do good to *as many* as he can, and to *all alike*, or be defective in goodness. Does *this author* do good in this manner? Or think himself bound to do so, who is but a *trustee* of what he has? And may not God, if he pleases, when *all* are by him put into a capacity for happiness, yet put *some* into a higher capacity of happiness than *others*, and make it more easy for them to obtain. Have *any* reason, on this supposition, to complain? Have not all reason to be *thankful*? Has not God given them *all* he owes them, and *more*? And if he gives *some* greater occasion of thanksgiving, than *others*, does he deserve blame? Or should the rest cry out against him as *partial*? What work would *this* principle, if practis'd upon, make in the world? What foundation would it lay for *universal* discontent? Should men represent God to themselves as a *partial* being, and acting in a manner not *befitting* him, if *all* men are not in *equally* happy circumstances?

SHOULD it be alledged, that God being infinitely wise and rational, must ever have a *reason* for what he

he does; but there can be no reason, why he should make *distinction* in his favours to his creatures, where all are on an equal foot as to *desert, necessity, and capacity* for bliss: I should think this a very unreasonable and unnatural *prescribing*, to the God of infinite wisdom. Suppose no other reason for this can be given, one would think it should satisfy any man, that this is *his pleasure*. But if not; may not *he* have reasons for his conduct, into which, a wiser man than *our author* cannot see? Is it not somewhat too assuming for a mortal of so narrow and limited faculties and understanding, to say, God acts *without* reason, because *he* sees not for *what* reason *he* acts? What is this but setting *his* reason on a level with *that* of God, and in effect above it? Is such talk agreeable to the *reason and nature* of things? One would think, nothing could well be more *unfit, unreasonable or unnatural*. But let us again hear him.

“COULD we suppose a God of infinite wisdom might ordain an *imperfect or insufficient* rule for his creatures actions; or, which comes to the same, afford them *no other* light for its discovery, but what had such defects, as left them *unable* of knowing their duty, nor was sufficient to hinder them from falling into, and continuing in a *state of corruption*: I would ask, whether God did this *knowingly, or ignorantly*, not foreseeing the consequence? To suppose *the first*, is to make God act out of *spite* to his creatures, in bringing them into being, and making that being a *curse* to them. If the *last*, why were not these defects supplied as soon as discovered? Or by infinite wisdom not discovered till these latter times, and then only revealed to a *small number*, when *all* mankind had *equal* need of them?”

God II. 2. 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16. 17. 18. 19. 20. 21. 22. 23. 24. 25. 26. 27. 28. 29. 30. 31. 32. 33. 34. 35. 36. 37. 38. 39. 40. 41. 42. 43. 44. 45. 46. 47. 48. 49. 50. 51. 52. 53. 54. 55. 56. 57. 58. 59. 60. 61. 62. 63. 64. 65. 66. 67. 68. 69. 70. 71. 72. 73. 74. 75. 76. 77. 78. 79. 80. 81. 82. 83. 84. 85. 86. 87. 88. 89. 90. 91. 92. 93. 94. 95. 96. 97. 98. 99. 100. This

THIS author, with all his boasted reason, commonly builds on *mistaken* suppositions, and often considers not *whither* his argument will carry him, so he may discredit christianity and ruin revelation. Who ever did *suppose*, or gave him authority to suppose, that God ever gave his creatures a *rule*, insufficient to guide their actions? God never gave a *law* to his creatures, but what was fully *accommodate* to the ends for which it was given. And as the *law of nature* is comprehensive of *all* that duty, which is founded on the *reason* and *nature* of things, so if it be *exactly* obeyed, it is fitted to make men *perfectly* happy; and, as far as it is observed, has a fitness to make them *proportionably* happy still. And it is reasonable to suppose, as the *Scripture* informs us, that when this law was first given, and in the *first state* of human nature, it was accompanied with a measure of light, *fully sufficient* to discover every branch of it, as there was *occasion* to practise it. But if man degenerated, obscured and impaired *this* light, he might become incapable of *knowing* much of his duty, and unwilling to practise what he did know, thro' *abuse* of that liberty with which God had indu'd him. To *this*, and *this only*, his *falling* into, and *continuing* in a state of corruption, might be owing. The *law* would not, in this case, be an *insufficient* rule, nor the *light* of nature an *insufficient* guide into the knowledge of it; but mankind by vicious *disregard* to it, or *opposing* the dictates of it, and yielding themselves up to the *sway* of *appetites* and *passions*, would become ignorant of much of it, and unready and averse to the performance of it, and stand in *much need* of a revelation and all its helps; and it would be an *act* of *favour* in God to vouchsafe it, but not what he was, in *justice* or *goodness*, bound to afford them.

AND, what does his *dilemma* signify? If God did this *knowingly*, *that is*, gave them a rule insufficient

cient to preserve them from corrupting themselves, "He acted out of *spite* to his creatures, and gave them their being to be a *curse* to them." So he must have done, according to this way of arguing, if he suffered *sin* and *misery* to be in the world, at least in some measure; nay, even in his *own scheme*, who supposes some men by their sins, in this world, may render themselves liable to *intolerable anguish* in a future life. Had God foresight of *this*? If he had, must he have made them out of *spite*, &c. If not, neither is it to be inferred from his argument. If *yea*, what is the consequence? Then God, who governs *human* affairs, is not a *benevolent* being, but, it seems, a *spiteful* and *malicious* one.

INDEED, if a good God governs the world, *whence all the evil that is in it?* is a question not easy to answer; nor shall I enter into it here. But that there is *much* sin and misery in the world, is certain. It is as certain too, and, as *this gentleman* allows, demonstrable, that there is a God, and that this God is a good, *that is, kind and beneficent* being. If we cannot tell, how so much evil should be in the world, when a *benevolent* being, able to prevent it, is *at the helm*; must we deny that there is such a thing as sin in the world, or that there is a God? and so turn *brutes* or *atheists*? Renounce our reason and even eye-sight, or renounce all religion, the highest *improvement* and greatest *grace* of our reason? Surely not: but conclude rather, that an infinitely wise and good being, has both *wise* and *good* ends in *this* conduct, though they lie out of our reach. It may, for any thing we know, be for the good of the *universe*, of which our world makes but a very *little part*. Or if not, it may be for ends worthy a being both *wise* and *good*.

"BUT if ignorantly, not foreseeing the consequence, why were not those defects *supplied*, as soon as discovered? Or not by infinite wisdom

"disco-

“discovered, till these latter times?” Who supposes God ignorant of such a future event? Or that he did not discover these defects, till these latter times? But if he did, “Why were not these defects supplied, as soon as discovered?” And at last revealed only to a few, when the rest had equal need of them? The sentiment is hardly to be made sense. What is it was at last revealed to a few, &c. but these defects? Who had need of them, when they were revealed to others? But to guess at his meaning. Was God obliged, because he is God, to supply all defects as soon as discovered? What, before they happen? For the general sentiment of mankind is, that God discovers all events, before they happen. Or as soon as they happen? Is not God good, unless this be done? Let him reconcile the sins and miseries of mankind, every where observable through the world, without God’s applying an immediate remedy to those defects, upon their first appearance, with divine goodness; and I will undertake to reconcile his deferring a remedy, to the defects. He complains of, till the time the gospel revelation was communicated. And,

What if “God’s goodness be always the same, must the effects of it therefore be ever the same, without variety? Must he impart equal privileges, benefits and blessings to all people, and that at all times? Nay, to all the several individuals of mankind? Must he apply immediate remedies, to the evils that befall any, and every people, whose needs are equal? Take this principle along with you, and search into the history of the world, and what will become of divine goodness? Are not the effects of this goodness very various to different nations, and to the same people at different times? Were not the Greeks and Romans privileged, in

many respects, above the nations they termed *barbarous*? Is there not a manifest distinction in *privileges* between many *European* nations, and the inhabitants of *Iceland, Greenland, &c.*? Is there not a vast addition to the *privileges* of *Britain*, since the days of *Julius Caesar*, nay, since the reign of *Henry VII*? And yet was not the *divine goodness* the same, then as now? Or is God since grown more able, or more disposed to do good. Look into *Palestine*, a land once flowing with milk and honey, able to subsist several millions of inhabitants, though so little a spot, and you'll find it little better than a *desart*? Was God therefore better heretofore than now?

GOD is equally good at all times, but he does not equally communicate his beneficence to all persons, people, places at all times. And if he did, it would not look as if he did good with discretion, but of meer necessity, and without any choice. This might argue him very good, but not freely so, nor perhaps over-wise, yet wisdom in perfection, is as much an attribute of deity as goodness, unless wisdom in its self be no perfection. And then God might not immediately prescribe a remedy for those evils of mankind he speaks of, but defer the full prescription for ages, and then communicate it to some nations only, though it might have been equally beneficial to all, without any derogation from his goodness. But he asks,

“CAN a being be denominated good, who is
“so only to a few, and cruel and unmerciful to
“all the rest?” The rest of whom? Of mankind?
But why must they only come under consideration?
It is highly probable other worlds may be peopled
as well as ours. And that there may be various
classes of beings superior to man, (as there are cer-
tainly many below him) and these, perhaps, will
necessitate what passes in our world. And that may

be

be good for the *universe* in general, which may have another appearance, in *one part* only of the system. No being is good, who in the proper sense is *cruel* and *unmerciful* to any, and much less to the *most*. But this should not have been taken for granted, in the case under consideration, but *proved* : which never can be done. God is not cruel to any of his creatures. Those least favoured by him, have many reasons to be *thankful*, which proves him beneficent and kind even to them. If he is more kind to *some* than *others*, he does nothing but what he has a *right* to do, and what his unerring wisdom pronounces fit. So that "Mankind's necessities" and God's goodness, are no argument that a revelation *must* be general, if made at all." There being no more inconsistency in God's favouring *some* with a revelation, which he affords not to *others*, than in any other *distinguishing* instances of his common bounty. This way of talking, pursu'd into its just consequences, arraigns God, for that *subordination* of things that is visible through the world.

No, says he, though there be such a *subordination*, for the happiness of the *whole*, it does not hence follow, that God will not, *here* or *hereafter*, bestow on the rational creation, all the happiness of which their nature is *capable*, this being the end for which God gave it them. Whether this last be so or no, has been considered above : And how precarious an inference *that* is, which is drawn from such an assumption, is left to the reader. But what means he by saying, though there be such a *subordination*, it does not follow, &c? Was *that* the question before him? What has this to do with God's distinguishing some from others, by vouchsafing them a *revelation*? Supposing God designs all the rational creation, *here* or *hereafter*, the whole happiness

happiness their nature is capable of, may he not yet favour *some* with a revelation *here*, which he withholds from *others*? May they not, this notwithstanding, according to *his scheme*, have all the happiness *hereafter*, which their nature is capable of, though not so immediately after death, as those who enjoy the *benefit* of revelation? He has contrived a way for *their* happiness, who die in a state of disobedience to the *law of nature*, after they have for a due time been punished with *anguish intolerable* in an after-life. Why may not those who yield a *sincere* obedience to the law of nature, as far as it is made known to them *here*, have a measure of happiness *hereafter*, proportioned to their measure of obedience, and in this *after-state* be farther tried, to fit them for *all* the happiness of which their nature is capable? He certainly has no right to dispute this supposition. But it is gross mistake to suppose God designed *all* his rational creation, for *all* the happiness of which their nature is *capable*, as has been sufficiently made appear. But,

SAYS he^a, “ Can God, who equally *beholds* all
 “ *the dwellers on the earth*, without prejudice or
 “ partiality, make some people his favourites,
 “ *without* consideration of their *merit*, merely be-
 “ cause they believe *some opinions* taught in the
 “ country where they *happen* to be born? Whilst
 “ far the greater number shall from age to age
 “ want the *favour*, not on account of their *desert*,
 “ but because *destined* to live in places, where God,
 “ who always acts from motives of infinite wisdom
 “ and goodness, has thought it *best* to conceal *such*
 “ opinions from them? What can more represent
 “ God, as an *arbitrary* or *partial* being, than this
 “ to suppose, that he vouchsafes not to afford the
 “ greatest part of mankind, the *happiness* of which
 “ he has made them *capable*? ”

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THIS gentleman does not always take care to speak to the point in debate, betwixt him and the advocates for christianity and revelation, but either mistakes or misrepresents it. Who amongst them ever asserted, "that any shall miss the divine favour, merely on account of their being destined to live in places, where God has thought best to conceal certain opinions from them, not for their demerits." Those who think the *heaven* world in general excluded divine favour, yet suppose their demerits, their original pravity, and personal vices and sins, the only reason and foundation for it. And those who think them still capable of some measure of the divine favour, think it will be their own faults solely if they miss of it, not their being "destined to live, &c." Or who ever maintained or thought, "that any shall be his favourites, because they happen to be born where certain opinions are taught?" None was ever so wild to assert this, though it is to be feared, too many have cheated themselves out of happiness, by substituting right belief in the room of a religious life. Surely it is belief of christianity issuing in obedience to the rules of it, a faith working by love, that alone entitles any to the happiness promised by it. And among these rules are every branch of the natural law.

AND, on this foot, men are not made the favourites of God, or entitled to the happiness of the Gospel, without consideration had of their merit, in his sense. Their belief of it, their obedience to it, and to the laws of nature incorporated with it, must precede their enjoyment of this happiness, and prepare and qualify them for it. Nor do any miss the divine favour, because they do not believe the Gospel, never yet made known to them, nor for any thing but their demerit; that is, neglect of that duty which they may know and perform; or wilful disobedience to the known laws of nature, or wilful

ful neglect to enquire into what they *may know*, upon application and diligence in their enquiries. TRUE, it is, that however *sincere*, and *diligent* in their endeavours to know and do their duty, they may not be entitled to the *same*, or *equal* happiness with christians; nor are *all* who enjoy the benefit of revelation intitled to *equal* degrees of felicity? What then? Is God then a *partial* and *arbitrary* being? Why? Because he does not vouchsafe them the happiness of which their nature is *capable*? Must he, then be *arbitrary* and *partial*, unless he makes all his creatures as happy as the capacities of their nature will admit? Is nothing to be left to *their own* voluntary improvement of helps, and enlarging their own capacities for bliss? And is it not manifest, that the natural *capacities* of mankind are various, and where they may be *equal*, there is yet great diversity in their advantages for bliss? Is a *ploughman* or *mechanic*, within his sphere of life, capable of the same happiness as one of plentiful *estate*, liberal *education*, high *rank* and publick *station* in the world; even supposing them endow'd in proportion to their circumstances, with an *equal* degree of virtue? Can one have as *manifold*, as *fine*, as *full* an enjoyment of pleasure, as the *other*? Can one display as *extensive* a benevolence, be as useful in the world, and have as *high* and *relishing* a satisfaction herein, as the *other*? Certainly, though his nature, as *human*, is equally capable of this bliss, supposing his natural capacities and advantageous helps *equal*, in his different circumstances, he has *not equal* capacity for it. Must God act *arbitrarily*, now, and be counted *partial*, if he sets not the *peasant* and the *peer* on a level, and gives not both an *equality* of bliss? May not God have wise and good reasons for making a difference? And why then may he not put a *christian*, into a capacity of more exalted bliss, than he who enjoys not the benefit of revelation, without incurring blame, as an *arbitrary* or *partial* being? SHOULD

Should a man supply one indigent person, so as that he needs nothing, when he puts another, equally necessitous, into a capacity of growing rich; is he to be reckon'd partial, arbitrary, and destitute of true goodness? If he may give out his bounty, in what measure he pleases, whilst he denies no necessitous object, a supply of real wants, and still be good; must the supreme Lord be reproach'd as arbitrary and partial, if he acts in the same manner? If he, who never enjoy'd the benefit of revelation, is yet capable of happiness, upon his doing his best towards knowing and practising his duty, may not God afford a revelation to others, more fully to teach them their duty, and render them capable of greater happiness, without doing any thing unbecoming himself? Must he make all mankind equally happy, or not be good? Then all the distinction in outward advantages or inward endowments, visible amongst men, is a reproach to divine conduct. It proves him, it seems, a partial and arbitrary being. Whatever his wisdom determines on the subject, this author's wisdom pronounces that he is quite wrong: "Seeing the greatest part of mankind, enjoy not the happiness of which he has made them capable." Had he been to administer the world's affairs, every *Hotentot* should have been as polite, learned, well-bred and virtuous, as the best of all his applauded philosophers: Equal in science to *Aristotle*, in eloquence to *Tully*, in morality to *Seneca* or *Antoninus*. Not one of the human species should have fallen short of the utmost bliss, of which human nature is capable. And why not every mule be a man, and every man an angel? For, according to him, God is defective in goodness, at least, if not wisdom too, that this is not the case.

Indeed what the difference will be, between the happiness of christians, and those who never enjoy'd the benefit of revelation, is not easy to determine. Y.

fine. But that greater capacities and Geniuses for happiness, may arise from the enjoyment of the christian revelation, to those who, in other respects, have not superior faculties, nor perhaps, have been more sincere in improving them, is manifest from the nature of the thing. Natural duty is made more fully known by christian revelation, than without it. The more fully this is understood, the more perfectly it may be practised. And if there be a natural good annexed to every branch of natural duty, this practice must be accompanied with a larger measure of felicity, *ceteris paribus*, even in this life. And it is reasonable to believe, the happiness of a future life, will hold proportion to improvements in piety and virtue in this life. The more enlarged the mind's capacity for bliss, when it passes from this to another world, the greater, in all likelihood, will its happiness there be. So that the plainest christian may, this way, exceed in happiness even Socrates or Antoninus.

Nor do christians look for the happiness of a future life, upon the foot of merit. They own themselves unprofitable servants, when they have done their best. They found their hopes on the merit and mediation of the son of God. And God, for his sake, may bestow a more exalted happiness, on those who own and honour this glorious head, than those who never did acknowledge or honour him in this character, though even these may be debtors to him, for what happiness they enjoy.

But as long as they, also, are capable of happiness in proportion to the talents they have and improve, those who have more or greater talents, may be entitled to greater happiness, in like proportion. Nor does this carry any contradiction to our natural notions of divine goodness: This infers not, that all are to be intrusted with equal talents. Nor to

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those scriptures which assert that God is not a respecter of persons: That men shall receive according to their works, and shall be accepted according to what they have (and well use and improve) not according to what they have not. For, if christians are not respected nor rewarded, for the mere name or profession of christianity, but as they live answerably to it; God is no respecter of persons, and they receive according to their works. And if honest heathens living up to the light they have and improve, are accepted of God and entitled to a proportionable reward, God is no respecter of persons: They, too, receive according to their works; and are accepted according to what they have, and not according to what they have not. But God's being no respecter of persons, does by no means imply, that he must not intrust men with different talents.

NOR is this "narrow notion," as "he calls it," "any way inconsistent with the character of a Being of infinite benevolence." Such a Being is not bound to shew himself kind to all his creatures, nor all of one kind, in the same degree. And if infinite goodness be always the same, it has always made distinction in benefits, between person and person, people and people, the same people and persons and themselves at different times. It has poured out its blessings in various measures, and does no otherwise here, than in other cases. As it has made angels capable of greater happiness, than men, Greeks and Romans than Pagans, Socrates and Antoninus than a Tartarian rover or wild Arab; why may it not make the disciples of Jesus capable of greater happiness, than such as never had the gospel-revelation, nor owned his name?

NOR needs he ask, "Where shall we stop, if men may lose any part of God's favour for impossibilities, or, the not observing rites, he never gave

11. "gave them?" He should have stopt, till some
 12. one had given him *occasion*, for putting such a que-
 13. stion. Those who never had, nor enjoy'd an op-
 14. portunity, for having *those* rules of life, were never
 15. bound to observe them, nor ever had such expecta-
 16. tion of happiness, as is set before *them*, in the go-
 17. spel, who have the *christian* rules given them: nor
 18. can be said, properly, to lose that share in the divine
 19. favour, which was never offered them, whether for
 20. *possibilities* or *impossibilities*. The true state of the
 21. question is, whether God may not, by revelation,
 22. propose a *more certain* and *complete* happiness to
 23. those, who are under the gospel, than to those who
 24. are not, without acting inconsistently with his good-
 25. ness? Or in other words, whether he may not put
 26. *some* men, into a capacity of *greater* happiness than
 27. *others*, without any wrong to *those* (which is ever
 28. implied in the notion of *partiality*) or acting other-
 29. wise than becomes him? Which to all, who be-
 30. lieve a God and providence, and consider the state
 31. of the world, and attend to the *reason* and *nature*
 32. of things, should, one would think, bear no dis-
 33. pute. But, says^a he,
 34. "If God be so *partial* and *prejudiced*, how
 35. could I admire, love and adore him?" I cannot
 36. tell how *he* can admire, love and adore the *divine*
 37. *Being* at all. For he must be such as the divine
 38. Being, certainly, is not, or *he* cannot, it seems,
 39. pay him *this* worship. But surely himself is some-
 40. what *worse* than *partial* and *prejudiced*, or he
 41. would hardly give himself leave to *libel* the deity
 42. in so irreverent a manner. He must be *partial* and
 43. *prejudiced*, and not worthy *his* love, admiration,
 44. &c. if he makes *any* of mankind capable of
 45. *greater* happiness than *others*. And yet thus he has
 46. ever done, and continually does. And this *imper-*
 47. *fection* in him, *must*, or *this* *author* *must* be mista-
 48. ken,

^a Page 371.^e *ibid.*

ken, "weaken all faith in a deity, and discard all his *perfections*. For admit *one* imperfection in God, and how can we be sure, he has *any one* perfection?" But should he not have been sure this was an imperfection, e'er he had drawn this inference? And has not the contrary been made fully to appear? But lo! the glorious issue of the author's demonstration of the law of nature, the religion of nature! if he, by *certain* deductions from *self-evident* notions, has at length made it out, that God has *one* imperfection, and therefore, for any thing we know, may have *no one* perfection. And where then is deity? And where the religion of nature?

BUT, says 'he, what *human* legislator, if he found a "defect" in his laws, and thought it for the "good of his subjects, to add new ones, would not "promulgate them to all his people? Or what "parent, would act after so *partial* a manner, and "not let all his children, as soon as possible, know "what was for their *common* good?" Here we have the *common* mistake of the point again. The defect provided against by revelation, was not in the laws of God, but the *subjects* to be governed by them. The laws of nature are the same they ever were, and as *completely* fitted to their end. But they had corrupted themselves, *impaired* their natural light, little heeded or consulted it, were grown *much* averse to its shining in upon them, and *more* averse to the being guided by it. This was the defect revelation was designed to remedy, not any defect in the *divine laws*. But why did not God communicate this remedy to all mankind? "since "human legislators, when they make new laws for "the good of their subjects, take care to promulgate them to all their people?" He should have explained, how far this is the care of human legislators, before he had brought their conduct to arraignment

arraign that of the *supreme* legislator. Indeed law-givers amongst men, make their laws so publick, that all who seek it, may come at the knowledge of them. Our statutes, when enacted, are printed, and whoever will, may purchase an act of parliament, and consult it, or borrow, if he can, without buying for the same purpose. But what farther care is there taken for promulgation? And what multitudes are there in Great Britain, never concern themselves to enquire what is in it, however fitted to promote the good of the publick? And were every act publickly read in our courts of judicature, or in all market-towns, or even parish-churches, how many of the people of Britain would yet be ignorant of its contents? It is the subjects concern, to enquire into the laws, by which their conduct should be regulated. And if legislators lay them open to their enquiry, they think it not necessary to make farther promulgation of them.

Why must more be made necessary to be done, by the supreme legislator? If he make a revelation, to the knowledge of which all may come, who make due enquiry, what farther promulgation of it must he make? Must he communicate the knowledge, full knowledge of every thing contained in it, to every mind? Must he leave nothing to men's industry, and voluntary exercise of their own powers, in coming at the knowledge of what God has revealed? If he may, it is manifest in all experience, that where revelation comes, multitudes may be utterly ignorant of its contents, and yet this duly promulgated. If he may not, but however men act, must communicate the knowledge of his laws to mankind, how can this be reconciled with the gross ignorance of many important branches of the law of nature, visible not only in particular persons, but even in whole nations? Is the law of nature sufficiently promulgated, where it is in a manner utterly unknown?

unknown? If not, what a charge is here drawn up against the *supreme* legislator? If yea, why this complaint in the case of revelation? If he says, enough of the laws of nature is still knowable, to secure their happiness, if they follow their best light, and endeavour to know their duty and practise what they know; as much of the *gospel* may have been communicated too, as may give them hope of pardon upon repentance, and make them so far capable of happiness. And then there is no more room to find fault, in one case than the other. Much of the law of nature is unknown to most nations on the earth, yet the law of nature is supposed sufficiently promulgated. Somewhat of the *gospel* has been hinted to most, if not, all nations; why may not this be a *sufficient* promulgation? If because some men must miss *part* of God's favour because no more is revealed, must they not miss *part* of God's favour too, because so much of the law of nature is unknown?

BUT is there no difference between the *supreme* and *human* legislators? This author, I am confident, will own, that *these last* receive their power, as a trust from the community, and properly speaking are but *servants* to it, though they have the most *honourable* post in it. And no doubt, he thinks them *accountable* to the community, so far, as that they may be removed, and others put into their places, for wilful, resolved and stubborn male-administration. Is the great God upon *these* terms with his subjects? Is not *his* authority underived, and indeed absolute? And limited in its exercise by *nothing* but his own perfections? He can do nothing *unbecoming* these. But is he bound to govern just as *human* legislators do, who are but *trustees* of the people? If *they* must make laws only for the good of their people, must *he* be thus limited? If *they* must make laws equally for the good of every subject,

ject, because they have received an *equal trust* from all, must *he*, who has received no power *in trust*, do the same? If *they* must proclaim every law they make, that is for the good of *all* their people, must God do so too? Is *he* under the same limitations, in the exercise of his power, as *they*?

But, in truth, *human* legislators are not thus tied up. Is there not in all societies, whether *monarchies* or *republics*, a distinction of *rank*, and together herewith a distinction of *privileges*? Is all such distinction to be destroy'd? Or, if it may still remain, must no laws be made *peculiar* to *one rank*, and *peculiarly* for *their* good, so it be not to the hurt of others? Or must *all* the laws made, *equally* aim at the good of *all*? Or if not, must those designed for the good of *some*, be yet made equally publick to *all*? In most nations and kingdoms, are there not *lesser communities*, who have their *peculiar* immunities and privileges? Must the legislature make *no laws* peculiarly regarding these, and *peculiarly* for *their* good? None but what are equally for the good of *all* the subjects, as for *these* communities? Or if peculiarly designed for them, must they yet be made publick to *all*? Or if they be laws for the *whole* community, which *human* legislators make, and for *their* good, must they be made publick to *all*, at just the *same time*? May not an act of parliament, made for the good of *all* the subjects of *Great Britain* be promulgated some months at *London*, before it is at the *Orkneys* or in *Scotland*?

If *human* legislators may make laws, for the good of *some members* of the community, and make these *no farther* publick than their particular use requires; or make laws for the community in *general*, and yet publish these *sooner*, in some places of their dominions than others: it's very hard the *supreme* law-giver must be more tied up, that he must make no laws for the good of *one part* of his

subjects, but what are equally good for all. Not make laws for his subjects in general, without making them publick to them all at once, especially when they are not bound to observe them, till they are notified to them. And it must be observed, when revelation was most confined, any might become members of the Jewish state and church, and enjoy their privileges, either in full, or in part, that pleased. And the christian revelation was designed for all mankind, was very soon propagated through the then known world, and how far beyond it we know not, though so great a part of mankind are now strangers to it. If any people, who once enjoyed it, have lost it from among them, or any might have enjoyed it, had they not faultily neglected it, this is not to be imputed to God, but to themselves.

BUT, says he, when God acts as governour of the universe, his laws are alike designed for all under his government, that is, all mankind (are they the universe?) and consequently, what equally concerns all, must be equally knowable to all. I suppose God acted as governour of the universe, in giving the law of nature. Does not this equally concern all mankind? And is it equally knowable to all? To a Scythian, an Hotentot, as to Socrates or Seneca? If it be said, as far as concerns them? But is it not supposed that a law, from the governour of the universe, equally concerns all? But passing that. How as far as concerns them? As far, suppose, as is necessary to their happiness. So far as revelation is necessary to happiness, revelation may be knowable to all? If men do not know it, nor can know it, God has not made this knowledge necessary to that happiness. This is not necessary beyond its promulgation.

BUT why must God, not act as governour of the universe in giving out a law, not binding on those, and to regulate the good of the rest of the world?

ed whom it is not made known. If the parliament of Great Britain make a law regarding the postage only, on the city of London, or any other town, corporation or incorporate, or even a particular subject, they still act here as the legislative power of Great Britain, not merely as legislators of the postage of the city of London, &c. And surely the great God acts as universal governor, when he gives laws to a part of his subjects, as well as when he gives laws to all. If he does not govern all by just the same laws, this does not divest him of his authority over the universe. Nor does he act only as governor of that part of his subjects. But he adds, "That is, if it be not an universal law, how can we be certain it is universal? Not at all. We may be certain it is not universal. What then? That it is not from God. How is this made to appear? Because every law of the governor of the world, must be universal? How is this made out? Does it not make itself out? Is it not self-evident? If it be not, no reason supports it, besides his *Ipse dixit*. Won't you take the word of such a master of reason for a matter of such moment? Should not every man renounce his Christianity, when he assures him, it cannot be a law from the governor of the world, because not universal? And may he not, by the same reason, prove the natural law binding parents and children to mutual duty, is not a law of the world's governor, because it concerns not angels? Or are these no part of the universe? Or not subject to the world's governor?"

But what means he by a law's being universal? Not its being fitted for all men, and binding upon

all to whom it is sufficiently made known: But being universally promulged, or made known to all mankind. And by the same argument, he may prove, that even the law of nature, as far as it concerns mankind, is not the law of the world's governour. For much of this is certainly unknown to multitudes throughout the world, and in their circumstances not much more possible to be known, than revelation. Look over the idolatrous heathen world, how little is the religion of nature concerning God and his worship known to them? And how unlikely is it they should be better informed? When superstition is so much the foible of mankind, the wicked priests have so powerful an influence over them, and the free-thinking few are forced to be so complying? Is not the law of nature, therefore, the law of the world's governour? Or are the matters of God's worship, no part of the law of nature; because, in his sense, not generally promulged? If the law of nature, this notwithstanding, is the law of the world's governour, why may not christian religion also be from God, though not yet made known to all men? Christian religion is in its nature fitted to be an universal law, is designed for all the world, was to be propagated to the ends of the earth; and that it has not yet been, may be owing to neglect in heathens, as well as christians. So that the sins of men may be the chief reason, why christian religion has not been universally promulgated, as they are, that the law of nature is so much unknown, though naturally revealed. But the universality of a law, is not the only certain mark of its coming from the governour of the world, nor any mark at all; for how should those who know not all the world, know whether a law be given to all the world? and therefore comes from the governour of the universe? And christian revelation may be from God, though not yet made known to all mankind. Whether it

to whom it is not made known. If the parliament of Great Britain make a law regarding the *poor* only, on the city of London, or any lesser body corporate or incorporate, or even a particular subject, they still act herein as the legislative power of Great Britain, not merely as legislators to the *poor*, the city of London, &c. And surely the great God acts as universal governour, when he gives laws to a part of his subjects, as well as when he gives laws to all. If he does not govern all by just the same laws, this does not divest him of his authority over the universe. Nor does he act only as governour of that part of his subjects. But he adds, "Is the universality of a law by the only certain mark, that it is from the governour of the world, how can we be certain, that a law, that has not this mark, comes from him?" That is, if it be not an universal law, how can we be certain it is universal? Not at all. We may be certain it is not universal. What then? That it is not from God. How is this made to appear? Because every law of the governour of the world, must be universal? How is this made out? Does it not make itself out? Is it not self-evident? If it be not, no reason supports it, besides his *Ipse dixit*. Won't you take the word of such a master of reason for a matter of such moment? Should not every man renounce his Christianity, when he assures him, it cannot be a law from the governour of the world, because not universal? And may he not, by the same reason, prove the natural law binding parents and children to mutual duty, is not a law of the world's governour, because it concerns not angels? Or are these no part of the universe? Or not subject to the world's governour?

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be or no, depends on other proofs, which notwithstanding his exceptions, have been already shewn to be good. But says ⁱ he,

“WHAT parent would act after so *partial* a manner, as not to let all his children know as soon as possible what is for their *common good*?” God is indeed the *common parent* of mankind. The proper author of their being. Of this, earthly parents are no more than *instruments*. But for the good of mankind, he has implanted in the hearts of all parents a *strong affection* towards their offspring, so that they can, in many instances, *deny* themselves, and *forego* their own advantages and comforts, for their sakes. And he is an *unnatural* parent, who is not concerned for *all* his childrens good. But because God is the *author* of our being, *must* he have the same *tendernesses* for his rational creatures? *Must* he be acted by a *like instinct*? Or does he stand upon the same foot towards his rational creatures, as *parents* towards their offspring?

WHAT *earthly parent* would not, were it in his power, change the *bias* of a child's mind when likely to lead him into mischief, and give a *turn* to his misguided and perverse will, and communicate to him a *better disposition*? Is the *supreme ruler*, who made man free, and governs him *suitably* to his nature, bound, because he is *his maker*, to shew his *fatherly love* in this manner, and cross all the wise measures and rules of his government? *Parents* on earth, would heap all the *favours* they can on their children, and make them as happy as possible, though very few *without distinction*. *Must* the great God act in *this manner*; because the *common parent* of mankind? *Earthly parents*, when any danger threatens a child, would, if they could, interpose to prevent it. *Must* God therefore interpose to prevent *every mischief* that befalls mankind?

And

And why must he then as soon as possible discover to *all* men, what is for their *common* good, because earthly parents would do so to their children?

Look into the world, and see if the *common* conduct of providence will *fulfil* this principle. Does God thus *over-rule* mens inclinations for their good: thus *pour out* his bounty, and heap favours on *all* men? Does he, as soon as possible, discover to *all* men, what is for their *common* good? Is it not for their *common* good, that all mankind should have a *complete scheme* of natural duty? Is this vouchsafed to *all* men? Look round the world and see. Or are the hearts of all men influenced by him, to pay a *due* and *full* regard to that duty they *do* or *may* know? Yet *earthly* parents would influence their childrens hearts, were it in their power, *rightly* to improve and use the talents and advantages they put into their hands.

WHAT then is the consequence? That God is *not* a kind parent, nor does *his* duty to his offspring? Not as kind and good as *earthly* parents are, which yet *he* is bound to be? Is he properly under *any* bonds? Or does he not understand his *own* obligations? Or does he want *will* or *power* to fulfil them? Does he, *can* he act in a manner *unbecoming* him? And is not *this author* quite wrong in his triumphant talk on this head? And what is its real tendency? Not to *overturn* christianity, but *reproach* the great ruler and parent of the world, as acting a part utterly *inconsistent* with his character, as the God of infinite *wisdom*, the *law-giver* to the universe, and the *maker* and *parent* of mankind. Not *one* of his Arguments concludes short of this, if it concludes any thing to *his* purpose.

ONE would hope, therefore, it is evident, that the gospel-revelation *may* be divine, though not yet made known to *all* men. And that God was *not* obliged in wisdom or goodness, to communicate

it sooner, or more generally than he has done: as long as he binds not those who never could have it, to believe and obey it; and has hinted as much of it to all men, as may encourage their hopes of pardon on repentance, and of acceptance in their honest endeavours to know and do their duty. Those who enjoy it not in full, have yet much reason to be thankful to a good God. Those who do, have an higher privilege and more reason to be thankful. God is good to both, and perfectly good in himself. And it is no way necessary to this, that he should be equally good to all his creatures, nor to all of the same species, whether they be considered as his creatures, children or subjects.



SECTION II.

His Objections more peculiarly against the Christian Revelation, considered.

HAVING gone through those arguments of this author, which, though aimed at the christian, militate against all revelation; I proceed now to consider what he has peculiarly to object to that, Which may be reduced to four heads,

First, He objects to it, that there are many things delivered in the christian revelation and the Jewish as predecaneous to it, apt to mislead men into wrong notions of God, prejudices against revelation itself, breaches of the law of nature; and that the stile and language of christian revelation in particular, is not plain enough for the use of mankind in general, whose good it should aim at.

Secondly,

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Secondly, He objects to the doctrine of christ's sacrifice for sin.

Thirdly, To that of his mediation.

Lastly, He objects, that christian revelation has not mended the hearts and lives of men. Each of these shall be distinctly considered.

Sub §. I. His Objection to Christian Revelation, as not being plain enough for common use, considered.

FIRST, HE finds fault with scripture, as not plain enough for common use. And many particular accusations, he draws up against it, to support this general charge: As that it is apt to mislead men into wrong notions of God, breaches of the law of nature, prejudices to the discredit of revelation itself, and even the teaching of our Saviour is by parables, and in such a figurative manner as not to be a sufficient direction to mankind how to believe. All this shall be considered as far as will suit the design of this piece, without swelling it to too great a bulk. But the author of it, who never could boast much skill in Jewish language or learning, and is now without books, and has long been, must beg the world's excuse, if he does not critically examine all his citations from the Old Testament: he must leave that to some better qualified. Though he will give some general hints, as it comes in his way, by which the force of most of his objections may be fairly avoided, and shewn to have nothing in them to the just prejudice of christian revelation. Let us therefore attend him through his chief difficulties. And

*First, He objects to christian revelation, that it is not plain enough for common use. " Had a revelation, says * he, been given of God, it must*

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" have

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“have been plain, and delivered in the plainest words. Certainly, the common parent of mankind is too good and gracious, to put the happiness of his creatures, on any doctrines, but such, as plainly shew themselves to be the will of God, even to the ignorant and illiterate, if they use their own reason; otherwise the scriptures would not be plain in all necessary things, even to babes and sucklings.” I shall not stay nicely to examine this paragraph, and shew what inconsistencies are in it. Admit that a revelation from God should be plain, though I see no necessity, that it must be written in the plainest words that can be: And that the christian revelation should plainly teach the ignorant and illiterate, all necessary things, if they use their own reason, and the proper helps this implies, to find them out: And that the common parent of mankind, puts not their happiness, not that of the ignorant and illiterate, on any doctrines but such as shew themselves to be the will of God, even to their own reason: and that scripture should be plain in all necessary things, even to babes and sucklings; what is hence to be inferred? That the scriptures are not a revelation from God, because not thus plain, in these necessary things? If he means that those who cannot read the scriptures, cannot by reading them, learn these plain things, it is allowed. But then their reason should direct them, either to learn to read, or, by some other proper means, learn what is contained in them. If he means somewhat else, what is it?

THEY contain many things unintelligible to the most learned, some things about the meaning of which, there are endless disputes among the most subtle doctors, and doctrines very hotly controverted amongst them. Admit this. What then? Then these are not among the necessary things, which the ignorant and illiterate must know, or miss of happiness.

ness. Does not he himself tell us, that a peasant is not required to know as much of the law of nature, as the rector of *St. James's*? Why then may not such among christians, be supposed to know all things necessary for them to know, and be in the way to happiness, though they do not understand, what even the learned cannot understand? Or why may not the learned, the subtle doctors know on both sides, what is necessary to their happiness, though there are some things controverted amongst them, and they disagree amongst themselves, about the meaning of some passages in scripture, as well as his philosophers? Had they no disagreement? Were they all of one sect? Was nothing controverted amongst them? Did they not dispute one with another, about the *summum bonum*, the chief good of man, and differed wider, run into more opinions about it, than christians do in any point of difference among themselves? And could they, then, be all agreed about the duties of the natural law? Certainly not, if they deduced these, in our author's way, from self-evident notions. He makes what is for our good (out of which, one would think, the highest good is not to be left) the measure of divine commands. At this they must all aim, or God act as an arbitrary ruler. And what is for our hurt he must forbid, which, whatever is inconsistent with our chief good, must needs be. What was then the chief good of man, seems necessary to have been agreed among philosophers, if they deduced the laws of nature in our author's way, or they ne'er could have agreed in these laws.

BUT if philosophers, under the conduct of the clear light of nature, so very sufficient, according to this author, to direct the most unlearned in their duty, controverted this point among them, without derogating from the law of nature, why should it derogate from christian revelation, that some things

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should occur in it, about which christians may differ and dispute? If the law of nature be a revelation from God, though philosophers have differed in a point of such importance, why may not christian revelation be from him, notwithstanding controversies among christians? If it be said man's chief good may be clear to natural light, if duly attended to, so is christian revelation in all points, equally necessary to christians happiness. And even as to disputed points, the scripture revelation may be clear and plain, though men prejudiced, in haste, inadvertent, &c. mistake the sense and meaning, and contradict the words and others. Nor are any of the controverted doctrines among christians, one may venture to say, of more importance, than this of the chief good among philosophers. Nor, perhaps, is the determining any of these controverted points, necessary to either the learned or unlearned. But common christians are not bound to determine any of the "innumerable disputes which he tells us, are among christians, and depend not on the reason of things, but critical skill in dead languages." If any such disputes are, common christians have no concern in them.

The question is, whether common christians may not learn from scripture, and that plainly, the nature and perfections of God, the chief good of man, a plain and full system of natural duty, and that enforced with stronger motives, than can be fetched from any or all the philosophers, and the way wherein to obtain pardon of sin and reconciliation to God, and be rid of all the misgivings of the guilty mind? If these things are so plainly delivered in our sacred writings, that common christians, with due care and application, may learn them thence, this is all that is essential to christianity, or necessary to their salvation. What depends on critical skill, what speculative men controvert and wrangle about, they may be ignorant

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rant of, without any prejudice to their acceptance with God here or happiness hereafter, if they do but sincerely endeavour to know and praise their necessary duty. These things are very plain in scripture, few do misunderstand them, and none would, if they used that measure of reason which God has given to all men, and carefully compared scripture with it-self.

SAY that the scriptures are written in a style different from what is in use amongst us, as is that of the eastern nations to this day. If it abounds more with figures of speech, with metaphors, allegories, hyperboles, &c. What then? Are they, for this reason, unintelligible? Or say they are not as easily intelligible to us, as if they were written in plain speech, without a figure? Are we sure that this author and those for whom he writes, would not have made an handle of this simplicity, to shake their credit? And would not the talk have been plausible? If Jesus had spoken and written like Greeks and Romans, would not this have appeared, to them, like sham and forgery? Jesus Christ, a Jew himself, delivered all his discourses to Jews. Must he, to humour these gentlemen, have altered all their usual forms and idioms of speech, and have talked to them in a way, which though more accommodate to Greeks and Romans, would have been very odd and uncouth to them, and not much more intelligible? The eastern way of speaking, tho' abounding with figures, sure, is not meer gibberish. Those people do by it communicate their minds to each other, and, by being customary and familiar, it is easily intelligible to them. And a language less figurative, would sound unnatural. Is it any wonder, our Saviour should talk to the Jews, in a way customary amongst them?

AND though the apostles went out into foreign countries, to spread their religion, and spoke their language

language fluently, it is not strange, if some of their own country idiom is mingled with their speech. Most of their epistles are directed to churches, in which were many Jews. These were dispersed through almost all the Roman empire. Were the first persons to whom, even Paul himself, the apostle of the Gentiles, address'd, where ever he came, and the first converts to christianity. Is it to be wondered at, that their language should in many passages, have a tinge of their own country, and be suited to the taste of those to whom they wrote? Is not this natural to all writers? Will not their own country idioms almost unavoidably mix with their foreign speech, when persons talk or write the language of foreigners? Especially if accuracy of speech be not their aim? But whether, this notwithstanding, the essential duties and doctrines of religion, lie not plain to every common reader, who has common sense and uses due care; will, I believe, be easily determined, by that time we have heard him out.

His talk therefore in the mouth of a free-thinking Mahometan might have been spared. "If faith be all resolved into the sole text of the alcoran (scripture) if we consider how many metaphors, allegories and other figures of speech: how many ambiguous, intricate and mysterious passages, may be found in this infallible book: how different are the opinions, expositions and interpretations of the most subtile doctors on every one of them, how shall we be certain of its meaning?" What are we here to understand by the sole text of scripture? The words without any meaning? What faith can be resolved into this? Or the literal meaning however senseless and absurd? Must men divest themselves of common sense and understanding, that they may find out the sense of scripture? Do any Christians direct to this method of enquiry into their religion?

gion? Does not himself tell us, that all sorts of divines employ their reason and understanding, in settling the sense of scripture? Why then should he put this talk into the mouth of a *Mahometan*? But if the *literal* meaning be not the *true*, then the *allegories*, &c. the *ambiguous* and *mysterious* passages, and the different *expositions*, &c. must leave men at utter *uncertainty* about the meaning of this infallible book? What, in passages not *ambiguous*, about which there are *none* of these *allegories*, &c.? And if all *necessary* things are plain and plainly delivered in scripture, suppose these *allegories*, &c. are not intelligible, or supposing some passages are *puzzling* and *controverted*, may not christians be certain of the meaning, in all *necessary* things? And is not this enough? *Puzzling*, *mysterious*, *controverted*, *figurative* passages, the common christian needs not concern nor trouble himself about. If he cannot understand *these*, he may meet with what he may understand, and what is *sufficient* to direct him right in the road to happiness.

INDEED it is but too common, for men to divert from matters that do concern them, and thrust themselves into those that concern them *less*, and indulge to *curiosity*, when they should be minding matters of importance. But this is *their* fault, for which christian revelation is not blameable. Every thing *essential* to belief and practice, is either laid down in *plain* words, or *such* figures of speech, as are obvious to common understandings. If it be delivered in the *language* and *idion* of those people and countries, where it was first published, and divine wisdom required the *scene* should be laid, and has some things in it, peculiarly fitted to *their* state and *circumstances*, to whom much of it was particularly directed, and, for these reasons, must have some difficulties, and occasion some disputes; yet if what is *necessary* to all, be plain to *all*, this is *sufficient*.

sufficient. They may leave these *difficulties* to the learned, and these *disputes* to those who will wrangle about them. If their *certain* meaning is not to be known, they are not bound to know it. But the *certain* meaning of what concerns them to know, may be known, and all *christians*, in a manner, are agreed about it. And there have been *disagreements* and *disputes* among *philosophers*, the great expounders, according to him, of natural religion. Various *expositions* and *interpretations* of many laws of nature are in them. And many *ambiguous* and *intricate* passages; and their expositors and interpreters have puzzled the text often, instead of explaining it. If this be no reason against searching into natural duty, why should it hinder our enquiries into revelation? And practising the *plain*, *obvious* duties required by it. But,

“TRUE religion, says ^mhe, ought to be *simple*, “*natural and plain*, as designed for all mankind, “*adapted to every capacity*, and suited to every “*condition and circumstance of life*.” Admit this. What then? Must such a simple, plain, and natural account of religion have nothing figurative in it? Have no figurative expressions a plain meaning? Are there none such in common and vulgar speech? But there must be none in it, to *puzzle* and *confound*, which scripture-language is apt to do. How does this appear in matters which common christians should necessarily know?

HE has brought together, in his way, many such passages, some of which are really *trifling*; as when he tells us, “a number of texts might be brought to prove *Moses a God*. He is called “*God and Lord*, and prayed to under *that* appellation, to forgive sin.” The passages he refers to, having no more room in them for this pretence,

than his own addressing a British peer, in case of injury and offence, with, My Lord, I beg your pardon? Does this imply his making a God of this peer? And the rest brought by him in proof of this assertion, are not much more to the purpose. Nor does it appear that ever any reader, whether Jew or Christian, was so weak, as to make Moses a God, and fetch countenance for it from these passages.

THE like is to be said of some expressions faulty with him, in the new testament. Advice, says he, is called submission, subjection, and obedience. Younger submit yourselves to the elder. Be subject to one another. Obey them that rule over you, and submit yourselves. Had he said, bearing to advice, he had been nearer the truth. But somewhat besides this is implied in these expressions. As humility, mutual condescension for each other's good, and due respect to the elder and church guides, though proper obedience as to rulers, is not meant by it throughout. So, when he talks, of that text, Compel them to come in, persuasion is called compulsion. A most unnatural abuse of words. Might he not as well find fault with calling good argument strong, prevailing oratory and eloquence irresistible? With talking of extorting by importunity, of the force of example, eloquence. &c. If such a tralatitious meaning of words be blameable, the most correct writers, even Tully himself, must be thrown by, as inaccurate. Let Quintilian describe the eloquence of Cicero, in what words would he do it? Cui tanta unquam jucunditas affuit, in ipsa illa qua extorquet, impetrare cum credas, & cum transversum vi sua judicem ferat, tamen ille non rapi videatur (is not this compulsion) sed sequi. Strange, that Quintilian

Exod. xxxii. 7. Ch. xxxiii. 1. Ch. xiv. ult. Gh. xix. 9.
Deut. xi. 13, 14, 15. Ch. xxix. 56. Ch. xxxi. 23. Page 303.
1 Pet. v. 5. Ibid. Heb. xiii. 17. Luke xiv. 23.

ilian should be such a negligent writer, and talk of persuading, as *extorting*, *carrying away by force*, and even *against inclination*. Is not this very improper and unintelligible talk?

MANY passages are cited by *batres*, without connexion, as the reader will see as we go on, in which way one may make *nonsense* and *blasphemy* of the most exact, accurate and pious writings. Many are gross *mistakes*, or wilful *perversions* of the sacred Writings, making them say, what they neither express nor intimate. I shall instance only in *two* or *three*. His misrepresentation of the scripture, in the case of *Judab* and *Thamar* may go first; for speaking of her *stratagem* to lie with *Judab* her father-in-law, he says, "though before he knew himself to be the man, he was resolved to burn her; yet after he cries, *she hath been more righteous than I*: and immediately adds^r, and for this righteousness, she was blest with *twins*, &c." I would leave it with any reader, what is the plain meaning of *this righteousness*, in the connexion in which it *here* stands, whether it can fairly mean any thing besides her lying with *Judab* by a *stratagem*? And then desire him to turn to the passage of scripture, and see if there be the least intimation, that this was the righteousness of *Thamar*, or that this righteousness was rewarded with the blessing of *twins*. And judge whether this can be thought other than wilful misrepresentation in the author, when he says, that *Judab* after cries out, *she is more righteous than I*. Why was the reason given for this, in the words immediately following, suppress, *because that I gave her not to Shelah my son*? Why, but because he could not then have deceived, even the most willing reader, by such a misrepresentation.

ANOTHER

ANOTHER instance is of the harlot Rahab, who he says, "is celebrated even in the *new testament*, for lying to the government, and betraying her country to its most cruel enemies." The texts of the *new testament* referred to by him, have not a word to this purpose in them. One only says^a, by faith the harlot Rahab perished not when she had received the spies with peace. The other, Was^a not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and sent them out another way? Her faith is commended in the first text, and her kindness to the spies as the effect of her faith, in the other. But the lie she told the government, is no part of her commendation. But when he adds, she is there celebrated, for betraying her country to its most cruel enemies, he passes all bounds of modesty. It does not appear any where in the story, that she acted a traitorous part to her country, but only concealed the spies, when they were sought for at her house. She believed, saith the author to the Hebrews, and therefore perished not with them that believed not. She look'd upon her country as lost, and her people as devoted to inevitable destruction^b, and that the Israelites would do to them, as they had done to the Amorites and people of Basan, and that there was no hope of their escape. Did natural duty to her country, oblige her, in these circumstances, to stay amongst them, and perish with it? Was it not reasonable to provide for her own safety and that of her family, if she could? Did she any more than the complying freethinkers, according to his account, commonly do? Would not this author, in like circumstances, do the same? And gladly escape himself, if a way offered, and preserve his relations from the common ruin? If he could not save his country, would he not

^a Page 237.

^a Heb. xxxj.

^a James ii. 25.

^b Josh. ii. 40, 11, 12.

not gladly save *himself*, and those that were in nearest *alliance* with him? And what did *Rahab* more? Though in *her case*, this farther is to be taken into consideration, that she was indeed acted by a *principle* of faith, and was at this time, 'tis likely, determined to become *one of the people* of God; which certainly, in these circumstances, she had a *natural right* to do: And therefore was under no tie to the people of *Jericho*, that forbid her doing what she did, for the preservation of *her self* and *house*. That she betray'd her country, no how appears. But that she is celebrated for her *treachery* to her country in the *new testament*, is shameless misrepresentation in *this author*.

THE like is to be said of his misrepresentation of the reason of the *Canaanites* destruction, to support his sentiment, that the *Jews* offered *human sacrifice*. "No wonder, says he, that a single person in the power of another might be devoted to God (for sacrifice) since free and independent nations were so devoted. And it was by virtue of such a *vow*, which *Israel* vowed to the Lord, that the *Canaanites*, who had never done *Israel* the least injury, men, women and children, were to be utterly destroy'd." I desire the reader would here ask himself, what *this author* means by this passage? Whether he does not by it intimate, that the *Canaanites* in general, were to be utterly destroy'd in virtue of this *vow*, men, women and children, who had done *Israel* no injury? Or in other words, whether he does not here assert, that the *free and independent* nations of the *Canaanites*, were devoted to destruction by *this vow*, men, women and children, and that without having given the *Israelites* provocation, and that this utter destruction was also made in *virtue* of this *vow*? Whereas it is here expressly asserted, that *Arad* king of

these Canaanites came out to fight against *Israel*, and took some of them prisoners; that hereupon they made this vow, and accordingly executed it. But this was but one part of the *Canaanitish* nations, and no very large part neither. Nor were the *Canaanites* in general, nor this part of them, devoted to utter destruction *merely* by this vow: but were *before* devoted to destruction by God himself, for their *idolatry* and other *enormous* crimes, and the *Israelites* were employ'd as executioners of divine vengeance: And having before received their commission, on this occasion, vow that they will execute it on *this people*, if God would deliver them into their hands. At least if this vow be supposed to include, what they would *hereafter* do, to all the nations of *Canaan*, the vow was not the reason of their utter destruction; this was owing to the sentence God had pass'd upon them, and sent the *Israelites* to execute, who only, in *this* vow, bound themselves to the punctual execution of it. So far is it from being true, that nations may be devoted, in *this manner*, to destruction, men, women and children; or that any are authorized by such a vow, to make such destruction without provocation given them, or any other warrant. Nor does *this* fact, nor any thing in the *Jewish story*, afford him any ground for thinking this was their sentiment. Many other passages might be produced of like misrepresentation in *this author*, but I have not room for all, and others will elsewhere fall in our way.

BUT let us attend to some of the particulars, by which he would make out this general charge, that the figurative expressions of scripture are apt to confound, puzzle and mislead men.

Secondly, Therefore, H. B. maintains, *that these expressions of scripture, are apt to lead men into*

A a

wrong

354 *Christian Revelation sufficiently plain.*

wrong notions of the divine nature and perfections.

As ^c *First*, THERE are innumerable Texts of scripture, that in the plainest manner words can express, impute human parts, human infirmities, and human passions, and these of the worst kind to God. What follows hereupon? Does not this suppose, that all have a right to examine, and have an understanding to judge, when texts are to be taken in their plain, obvious literal meaning, and whether they are, or are not consistent with natural light? and let me add, "and with other parts of the revelation." Undoubtedly: they are supposed to have such an understanding, and such a right to use it, or else it were to no purpose to put the sacred writings into their hands. Those who cannot distinguish between proper and figurative expressions, are hardly fit to read books. Such readers, I doubt, would hardly read Tully in his philosophical or more familiar writings, without making nonsense of him. Though therefore the sacred writings talk of God as having face, mouth, eyes, ears, hands, &c. of his coming and going; who that has common sense, can interpret this literally; and think that he has human shape or members? Could the Jews understand these passages in the literal sense, when their second commandment forbids all worship of God under a sensible representation, though only symbolical? And when they are so strictly charged in this matter to take heed to themselves, lest they corrupt themselves, and make them a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female; enforced with ^e this reason, for you saw no

^c Page 225, 226.

^e Deut. iv. 15, 16.

^e Which is a plain evidence that when the nobles of Israel are said to see God, (which he would have literally taken) p. 227. it must not be understood of God himself in any appearance, but of the Shechinah only, as Bp Patrick himself observes upon the Passage, notwithstanding the scrap he unfairly quotes from him.

manner of similitude in the day the LORD spake to you in Horeb. And why, but because such representations must debase and dishonour the Deity? And in the case of the golden calf, are they not charged with *changing (God) their glory into the similitude of an ox*? Could they imagine themselves prohibited only, by this command, such external representations, but allowed to figure God in any such manner in *their minds*? Could this be a reasonable thought? And must not natural light, enforced by this command, secure every man, who used common *understanding*, from taking the passages *be* blames in the *literal* sense?

If there have been such mistaken creatures as *Anthropomorphites*, were their wrong conceits owing to human *weakness*, or to the *sacred writings*, which have taken effectual care to guard against them? If to these last, must then, the much more *gross conceptions* and *representations* of Deity, common through the *pagan world*, be imputed to the *light of nature*, since under its conduct, according to *this author*, they yet gave into such mistakes? If it be said the light of nature gives *no countenance* to such conceits; no more do the *sacred writings*, but expressly condemn them, and warn against them, which can hardly be said of *that measure* of natural light, under which the heathen *actually* were. Say, the light of reason, had they attended to it and followed it, would have taught them *better*; the same may be said of *scripture revelation*, as *super-vening* and *assistent* to it.

But scripture imputes *human passion*, the very *worst* of them to God. He is said to be *jealous and furious*; nay himself says, *my fury shall come up in my face, for in my jealousy and the fire*

of
Aa 2
Psa. cvi. 19, 20. Page 116. Nah. i. 2.
Ezek. xxxviii. 18, 19.

" of my wrath have I spoken. Nay, scripture taken
 " literally supposes God does things of the greatest
 " moment in wrath and fury: for thus he gave his
 " favourite people " statutes, which were not good, and
 " judgments, by which they could not live. Nay, " he
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 " who has no superior to invoke, can swear at all,
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 but to have or shew *no displeasure* against sin, were
 utterly unbecoming. And if the *prophets* speak of
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 " keep this habitual reflection in our minds, that
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 of himself according to his *own* conceptions, wou'd
 be

^m Ezek. xx. 25.

ⁿ Page 25.

^o Psa. cv. 11.

^p Page 115. Edit. 1726.

be to us unintelligible: unless his capacities of mind or understanding, be on a level with ours.

A *ND* that *benevolence*, which our author ascribes to the divine Being, and makes in a manner the whole of it, will be as improperly attributed to him without such allowances, as even *anger* and *fury*. And why, with this allowance, he may not be said to be *angry*, *jealous*, *furious*, as well as *kind*, *merciful*, *compassionate*, I do not see. Nor why these should be represented as the *worst* of human passions, since, within *due* bounds they are as reasonable in themselves, and of as much *use* in *society* as the others: and kindness, mercy, benevolence, towards objects *unfit*, may be as mischievous as anger and wrath. And as long as anger, in a sense *becoming* the divine nature, may be ascribed to God, people are no more liable to mistake when this is talked of in *poetical language*, than when mercy and loving-kindness are ascribed to him, and thus *poetically* described.

B *UT* this gentleman has the unhappiness very often to read or quote scripture by halves. He takes a scrap of a sentence, and overlooks the connection, either through *inadvertence* or *design*, and quite perverts the sense, else he could never have told us God does things of the *greatest moment* in a *passion*, because he gave his favourite people *statutes that were not good*, &c. as if he had framed the *Jewish laws*, and settled that constitution in a *fit of anger*. For that this is his plain meaning, is evident by his backing this quotation with that of the Apostle Peter, *a yoke which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear*. Whereas the giving them *statutes that were not good*, is consequent upon their *rebellion* against him, their *not walking in his statutes*, and *keeping his judgments*; which if a man do, *he shall live in them*. It is because they had not

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^a Ezek. xx. 21, 24, 25, 26.

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ⁿ Page 25. A. ^p Psa. cv. 117.

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^a Ezek. xx. 21, 24, 25, 26.

executed his judgments, but had despised his statutes, and polluted his sabbaths, and their eyes went after their fathers idols, that he gave them statutes that were not good; and is plainly meant of giving them up to their idolatrous humour: for it immediately follows, *And I polluted them in their own gifts, in that they caused to pass thro' the fire all that opened the womb, that I might make them desolate, to the end that they might know that I am the Lord.* The giving is no more the immediate act of God than polluting them. And both mean no more than his leaving them to the bent of their own inclinations, without laying these under restraint, and this in just displeasure, and with an intention to punish them in due time. In which there is nothing unworthy God, unless we suppose him as indolent and regardless as this author's light represents him.

But when he speaks of God's *swearing*, and *swearing in a passion*, he is either trifling or profane. He plays with words. "Ought we not to examine whether God, who has no superior to invoke, can swear at all?" not by a superior, it is plain upon view, without examination. What then? Then he can't swear in this sense. But may he not swear without invoking a superior? He may certainly, if the Apostle to the Hebrews may determine, who has obviated this difficulty by telling us, *that men verily swear by the greater, but God because he could swear by no greater, (by invoking no superior) swears by himself.* And had he not, none could apprehend that God swears by a greater, especially when they find his oath is generally in this form, *as I live, saith the Lord*; that is, *as sure as I am the living God.* And when this gentleman's hand was in, I wonder why he did not criticise on our Saviour's saying, *swear not by thine head, for thou canst not make one hair black or white.* Would

Would it be *argument* or *trifling* to ask whether a man can swear by his head at all, seeing his head is not his *superior*? Are not such asseverations as *by my faith, upon my life*, to be condemned as *oaths*, for this reason? If God, and he only is to be invoked in an *oath*, and so sacred a thing is profaned by such a *form* of asseveration, is it not to be condemned, as such an *oath*? And is not this exception against such a way of speaking, *weak* and *trifling*?

WHEN God is said to *swear in his wrath*, that Israel should not enter into his rest, who, that ever had just notions of God, did or could, put this author's meaning to the words, and understand it of his *swearing in a passion*? But if God were justly displeased with that people for their sin, and resolved hereupon to exclude them from the *promised rest*, or settlement in *Canaan*, might he not solemnly declare this purpose to them? And what more is meant by the expression?

BUT he goes on, "How often is God said to *repent*? Is he not said to repent of the very first action he did, towards man? He repented him that he made man, and it grieved him at his heart. Nay, does not the scripture suppose, that he has repented so often, that he is weary of repenting?" What now is it to repent? It must mean either a *change of mind* or *purpose*, or an *inward grief and uneasiness* issuing in such purpose, and a *different tenor* of actions. Do any readers of the bible, who have the direction of *natural light* as well as others, and are thereby instructed according to this author, to frame *worthy* conceptions of God, or in other words do frame *worthy* conceptions of God, ever understand such passages of *real grief* and *uneasiness* in God upon account of what he had done, or of a *change of mind* and *purpose* in him

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Gen. vi. 6.

Jerem. xv. 6.

who

change not, nor in either of these senses can repent, as the scripture and common reason plainly tells them? No, but though God speaks of himself, after the manner of men, they put a sense on his words worthy of God, not ascribe any of the imperfection of the human mind to him. In the passage first referred to, the next words shew, what this repenting means; viz. God's proceeding with sinful mankind, as if he were sorry he had made them, by cutting them all off, one family excepted.

Now when God says that he is weary of repenting, can any one understand this of being weary in the literal sense. Had he quoted the whole passage, the meaning had been easy. In the beginning of the chapter God says, "Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, my mind could not be towards this people; cast them out of my sight.—Thou hast forsaken me, saith the Lord, thou art gone backward. Therefore will I stretch out my hand against thee and destroy thee. I am weary of repenting." What does this imply more or less, than that God had sometimes deferred, and sometimes removed judgments, as if he had repented of his threatnings; but finding them incorrigible, he would treat them in this indulgent manner no longer, nor use any further forbearance, but give them up, as is before expressed, some to death, some to the sword, some to famine, and some to captivity?

Secondly, He represents the scripture as leading men into mistakes about God's truth and faithfulness. "They represent him not only as falsifying his word, but his oath?" Two instances he gives, the first relates to the children of Israel, to whom God says, "Ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I swear to make you dwell in, and ye shall know my breach of promise. What reader, who will not be

Mat. iii. 6. 1 Sam. xv. 29. Gen. vi. 7.
Jer. xvi. 3; &c. Page 237. Num. xxi. 34.

at the pains to consult the passage, but would take this as an *entire sentence*? And that God threatens here that he would break a promise, confirmed with an oath? And that made to those very persons, threatened now to be kept from possessing the land, which God had promised and sworn they should dwell in. Which no person who understands any thing of the matter, and attends to the context, can think. It was not to *these* particular descendants of *Israel*, that God had promised this land, but to *some* of his descendants. And had *all* the *Israelites* then in being young and old, except *Moses* and his family, been cut off, and those *only* had been made God's people, and settled there: his promise to *Abraham*, *Isaac* and *Jacob* had been made good. God had never sworn, that *these* particular persons should dwell in *Canaan*? Nor can it therefore be understood of a proper breach of such promise, if it be so rendered. This language seems to upbraid them, with a charge against God, as if he were *false* to his word and oath. It is plainly implied, if it were not openly exprest in that murmuring speech of theirs, *Wherefore hath the Lord brought us to this land, (not to give us possession of it, as he had promised, but) to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey.* Their unbelief of his promise, and malicious behaviour were, at this time, their provocation. *And the lord said unto Moses, how long will this people provoke me? How long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs I have shewn amongst them? I will smite them, &c.* But when on *Moses's* intercession, God so far passes by the offence, as not to cut them all off, Yet, says he, *as truly as I live, those who have tempted me these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice, they shall not see the land which I swore unto their fathers, viz. to give their offspring.* And when he denounces his displeasure

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to them; it is to this purpose, *As I live, saith the LORD, as you have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you: Your carcases shall fall in the wilderness. Doubtless you shall not come into the land in which I swore to make you dwell (not you in particular, but you the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) — But your little ones which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land ye have despised. After the number of days wherein ye searched the land (each day for a year) ye shall bear your iniquities. Their punishment throughout, is pointed at their provocation. And then it follows, Ye shall know my breach of promise. That is, how presumptuously and wrongfully you charge me with such breach. You shall find I will make good what I have spoken in these words, and your children shall find that I will make my promise to you good. This is the plain sense of the passage, supposing the present rendering right. But the Hebrew is only, Ye shall know my breach. Which the Septuagint renders *ὡς ὅτι ὀργή μου ἐστίν*, mine anger, and the Vulgate, *ultionem meam*, my vengeance. And in this rendering, there is no room for mistake or exception.*

THE other instance in proof of this suggestion, is from *Psa. lxxxix*. In the first part of which ^h he tells us, “ is largely set forth the promises of God “ to David by covenant and oath. In the other part, “ David complains of God’s breach, both of his “ covenant and oath; and summing up these “ breaches, he says, *Thou hast made void the covenant of thy servant; LORD, where are thy former “ loving-kindnesses which thou swearst to David in thy “ truth?*” In this instance our author plainly shews himself a very careless and unfair citer of texts. He says, David complains in one part of the psalm, of God’s breach of covenant; whereas not only the inscription, which calls it *Maschil of Elhan the Ezraite*,

^a ver. 28, 29, 30, 31, 34.

^b Page 231 xxxi. 117

raite, but the *texture*, which plainly shews it could not be *David's*, nor *suit his times*, prove him in this matter not only mistaken, but heedless. But when he tells us, that in the *first part* of the psalm is largely set forth the promises of God to *David*, by covenant and oath, he is *worse* than heedless, unless by the *first part*, he means the first part to *his purpose*. The *Psalms* begins with a sort of triumph in divine mercy and faithfulness: *I will sing of the mercies of the Lord for ever, with my mouth will I make known his faithfulness to all generations.* Can any one of common sense think a divine writer, should in a psalm written to celebrate divine faithfulness to all generations, charge God with falsifying his oath and covenant? After this he goes on for several verses magnifying God upon *many* accounts, nor specifies the import of this covenant till he comes to the 19th verse. And just before, addressing to God, says, *thou art the glory of their strength, in thy favour shall our horn be exalted: For the Lord is our defence, the holy one of Israel is our king.* The blessings of the covenant, are indeed largely and poetically described. But the import is, that *David's* family should reign for ever. If this psalm was penned about the time *Jerusalem* was taken, and its kings carried into captivity, as *Bp Patrick*, I think, well supposes, the state of *David's* family seem'd to be ruinous, and at first view it looked as if their *rule* was at an end. And it is no wonder if a devout heart, in such *appearances* of things, should expostulate humbly with God hereupon. And that this is no more than such expostulation, is plain: for though the expressions are pretty strong and absolute, *thou hast made void the covenant of thy servant, thou hast profaned his crown by casting it to the ground*; after which for many verses he enlarges on their forlorn state, to support this assertion, and

at

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at last cries out, *where are thy former loving-kindnesses which thou swearst unto David in thy truth?* This can only mean that present dark appearances did not seem reconcileable with God's promises. And therefore these complaints issue not only in a prayer of hope, that God would consider the reproaches they were under, but close in his praises; *Blessed be the LORD for evermore, amen and amen.* Even that God, of whose mercy he would sing for ever, and celebrate his faithfulness to all generations, that is, the merciful and faithful God. How naturally does this suit with a supposition, that he had been charging God with falsifying his oath and covenant? It plainly speaks indeed, that the mind under a cloud, could not see through the dark scene, nor how to make the sad state of things at that time correspond with the covenant of God: but speaks, at the same time, firm persuasion that he was the faithful God, which makes him close the psalm, with blessing him; either on satisfaction obtained, or at least on confirmed persuasion, that God would make his word good, though the present state of things, had so little appearance of it. And it is left to any man of common sense, whether his construction or this, be most natural. Other things objected by him to this purpose, will be considered under a following head.

Thirdly, He would insinuate, *there are things in scripture, countenancing the violation of the natural law.* "There are things, either commanded or approved there, which might lead men into a breach of the law of nature, did not reason relieve against the mistake." That is, if they read the scriptures divested of reason and understanding; and what books would not mislead men in the same case? But many instances to this purpose are alledged by him. As ° Jacob's trick in getting his father's blessing;

Blessing; which is neither commanded or approved, but only related: *Jael's* being declared blessed above women, for an act, as he says, of the highest treachery: *Saul's* being commanded to destroy the *Amalekites*; men and women, infants and sucklings, &c. for injury done four hundred years before: *Ehud's* stabbing *Eglon* king of *Moab*, to whom his people sent him with a present, on a message from the Lord: *Elisha's* cursing the children in the name of the Lord; and *Elijah's* calling for fire from heaven, to consume two commanders and their companies, for no other fault, (if you'll take his word) than bluntly delivering a message from their king, and perhaps in his own words. On which he takes occasion to tell us, that the holier men were under the old testament, the more cruel they seem to be, and addicted to cursing. * *God's* causing a famine for three years, in the latter end of *David's* reign, for *Saul's* crime in slaying the *Gibeonites*; and his smiting the *Israelites*, and slaying seventy thousand for *David's* fault, in causing these innocent sheep, as he calls them, to be numbered. Which, as he represents it, was punishing men for crimes, of which they were not guilty: and so charges injustice on the righteous governour of the world.

I HAVE not room to answer to all these cavils particularly, but as he has singled out the case of the *Israelites* invading *Canaan* and destroying its inhabitants, as what he lays the greatest stress and enlarges most upon, under this head, I shall examine his reasonings on this case, and content my self with some general remarks as to the rest; which will make it plain to the reader, how impertinently they are alledged.

THERE
 * Judge v. 24. * 1 Sam. xv. 2, 3. * Judge iii.
 * 2 Kings ii. 23, 24. * 2 Kings i. * Page 238.
 * 2 Sam. xxi. * 2 Sam. xxiv. 1.

10 "THERE is a law of nature, says he", with
 "the observing which, God cannot dispense, ei-
 "ther in himself or his creatures." Indeed God
 can never act in a manner unsuitable to his nature, or
 unbecoming himself. Not because he is under any
 law, or proper obligation, but because the per-
 fection of his nature will not admit of it. It is such,
 that he cannot act otherwise than becomes him.
 Such law as this, man is not under; as is very ob-
 vious from the general conduct of mankind, who
 not only can, but too frequently do act otherwise,
 than they should. But a law God has given to his
 rational creatures, founded on the reason and nature
 of things, viz. their own nature, their mutual rela-
 tions, and their common relation to him, to which
 they should reckon themselves bound to pay constant
 regard. Certainly, whatever our author thinks,
 the law of nature, as binding on men, must take
 in the rights of God and secure them, as well as the
 rights of mankind amongst one another. And 'tis a
 breach of the law of nature, for any creature to
 pretend to determine, what, in every instance, is be-
 coming God. For it implies a knowledge of what-
 ever is, and is not becoming God, which no man
 can have; and is therefore, as Mr. Wollaston says,
 a transgression of the law of truth. And if the
 great author of nature should, at any time, suspend
 the obligation of a law of nature, is it not a breach
 of this law, for any creature to say, he cannot do
 it, it is a thing utterly unbecoming him to do?
 May he not have reasons for so doing, that lie out
 of the reach of men? and justify this conduct to
 his own judgment, always according to truth? Or
 is he tied down invariably to those rules, by which
 mankind are, without his interposure? May he
 never act as Lord of nature, in any circumstances
 whatsoever? Is it agreeable to the reason and nature
 of

of things, for any creature to talk thus? Is not such language *unnatural* and *unbecoming*?

AND does not this author himself allow, that what, in *some* circumstances, would be a *breach* of the law of nature, may in *other* circumstances be fulfilling such a law? How else will he account for *brothers* and *sisters* marrying, if cast on an uninhabited island, or coast, and *excluded* commerce with others of their kind? And why may not a divine command authorize a fact, which, *not thus* circumstanced, would be a breach of a natural law? Is not God's *interposure* a circumstance that carries more weight in it, than any he can offer in the *other* case? But whether this be so or no, without a knowledge of *all* circumstances, he can hardly be a judge of the morality of *any* fact! But the God of infinite wisdom, who *must* have a comprehensive view of all circumstances, infallibly knows what is *good* and *evil*, and what he commands, we may be sure has no *moral evil* in it. But let us hear him.

“ * If no religion can be true, which, in the
“ *minute*st circumstance, is contrary to the *righteous-*
“ *ness* of the law of nature; and the *gospel* incul-
“ cates all those precepts of natural religion, which
“ require the doing good to *Jew* and *Gentile*, even
“ the same we expect from them; and we are in-
“ dispensably bound to allow *all others*, the same
“ right of judging for *themselves*, which we claim
“ for *ourselves*: Must we not, if we will support
“ the credit of the *old testament*, suppose it to con-
“ tain nothing inconsistent with this *natural* right,
“ confirmed by the *gospel*?” Allow all this, what
then? — “ How can you then account for the
“ conduct of the *Jews*, in invading, and that, too,
“ *without* any declaration of war, the *Canaanites*,
“ a free and independent nation, and against whom
“ they had not the *least cause* of complaint (how
does

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does he know) “ and on pretence of their being
 “ idolaters, destroying not only men and women,
 “ but infants incapable of idolatry, or any other
 “ crime? If this were not done in *vision*, how will
 “ it be shewn *not* contrary to the law of nature?”
 With no great difficulty, one would hope, without
 such a *visionary* or *ludicrous* supposition.

ADMIT that, by the law of nature, every man
 and body of men have a right to judge for *themselves*,
 so as not to be forced by violence to renounce their
 own sense, or act against it, and that the *Israelites*
 were bound to do good to *Gentiles*, as well as their
 own people; and allow them *this* right, without
 persecuting or destroying them for *their* religion: It
 is to be hoped that this right of judging is not a
 right of calling evil good, and good evil, nor does
 exempt from *divine* animadversion. Conscience is
 exempt from human controul, not so from the di-
 vine. If men may not persecute others, for their
 religious *sentiments* in *practices* not hurtful to any,
 must not God punish for *notorious* violations of his
 natural law? It is also to be hoped, idolatry is a sin
 in breach of his natural law, as well as many other
enormous crimes, of which the *Canaanites* were guilty,
 and what God had a right to punish, unless men's
 right of judging for themselves, can change the na-
 ture of things, and turn *immorality* into *morality*,
 or at least excuse it. And then it is but to plead
 this right, and a robber or murderer must be exempt
 from the penalty, even of *human laws*. It may
 also be presumed, that God has a right to take away
 the lives of *infants*, though *guiltless* of idolatry or
 other crimes; or else he is doing daily wrong, in
 the *common* course of his providence, such *innocents*
 dying, in greater numbers, than any other age
 of life. And why not by a *violent*, as well as *na-*
tural death? These are the *dearest* property of
 parents, the taking *them* away, together with their
 guilty

guilty *parents*, may affect others *more*, who know themselves guilty of *like* crimes, than if the parent fell by themselves. It may be not only good and right in *it self*, but good for *mankind*, that such heinous sinners should sometimes be made *examples*. So that it can be no question, one would think, whether God may not, as the *wise* and *righteous* and good governour of the world, make such a wicked people *examples* to others, cut them off from their *country*, and quite unpeople it. And though he gives a propriety in their own land, to those who inhabit it, yet himself is still *original* and *chief* proprietor, and having laid it waste, may give it to what other people he pleases. Thus far, I should think, is plain and indisputable.

It is also, one would think, manifest, that if God may do this *himself*, he may employ what *instruments* he pleases to inflict this punishment. In any *society*, if a private man, without warrant from authority, hangs or beheads another, however criminal, he is a *transgressor* of the law of nature, which in society forbids such *private* execution. But any private man, when called out by lawful authority, may be the executioner of such a sentence, *without* any such transgression, though they who suffer never did *him* injury. Sure the great God has a power to pass sentence of *death* on criminals, as well as a *civil* magistrate. Nor does he receive *his* power as a *trust* from his creatures, but has it originally in and from himself. If then he calls out *any*, to be executioners of the righteous sentence he has passed, on *particular* persons or *bodies* of men, one would think there should be *no* transgression of the law of nature, in the case. Should he then empower *another* nation, to invade such a criminal people, and destroy them in war, he breaks no law of *his* nature, but acts as becomes the governour of the world. Nor do they who act on

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his commission and command, *transgress any law of nature*; unless paying obedience to a *lawful command of the supreme ruler*, be such a transgression. Which if this author will venture to say, none who judge according to the *reason and nature of things*, will say after him; whether there were a *declaration of war* antecedent to the invasion and destruction, or not. And yet *this author* talks without book, when he tells us, there was no declaration of war in the case. For it is plain, from what *Rahab*^b told the *spies*, and the *Gibeonites* afterward told *Josua*, that the body of that people did know, that the *Israelites*, who had so miraculously passed the *Red-Sea*, were not only coming, but sent of God, to invade and destroy them. Nor is it true that they had no *reason of complaint* against any of this people. For *Arad*,^c a king of the *Canaanites*, came out against them to war, whilst yet in the wilderness. *Sibon* forbade them passing by the skirts of his country, after a friendly message from *Moses*, that they should be unmolested by *Israel*; and came out, with an army, to hinder their passage over the river *Arnon*. And *Og* seems also to have been the aggressor. Though, whether they had reason of complaint against the *Canaanites* or no, matters not; they made war upon them in the name of God, and by commission from him; and this justifies them, if *themselves* had no ground of quarrel with them.

If such a command were then given of God, no law of nature could be violated by obeying it. But how should any be assured, that God gave such commands? "Suppose, says^e he, any should now
"plead, that they had a divine commission to de-
"stroy their next neighbours, whom they judge to
"be idolaters, men, women and children, in order

^b Josh. ii. 9, 10. &c.

^c Ver. 21, 22, 23.

^e Ch. ix. 24.

^f Ver. 33.

^d Num. xxi. beg.

^g Page 246.

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“to possess *their country*, would not our divines
“say, that no man could be *as certain*, he had
“any such command from God, as that God had
“forbid it him by the *light* of nature? Nor
“could *miracles* be a proof of such commission;
“since we can only know by the *nature* of the
“things themselves, whether miracles are done by
“good or evil beings. And if the light of nature,
“*(the voice of God himself)* teaches us, even to *de-*
“*monstration*, that God is infinitely wise and good,
“does it not likewise demonstrate, that *no command*
“can come from *him*, if not stamp’d with *these*
“characters? much less a command *inconsistent*
“with all those duties, men as men owe to one
“another?”

I know not what our divines would say upon the matter, as he states it. In the circumstances before-mentioned, it is certainly *no violation* of the law of nature, to execute the righteous sentence of God, not on *pretended* or *presumed*, but *notorious* idolaters, and violators of the natural law in many other instances. Nor therefore could any man be certain this was *forbidden* by the law of nature. If there were good evidence that God *had required* it to be done, ’twas a *breach* of the law of nature not to do it. And in this, I am apt to think, our divines will agree with me. Has God no way to make known his mind to men in this matter? Say, that by inward promptings to the minds of men, in this age, where such prophetic impulse is *unusual*, this could not be made evident to our divines, yet if such notifications were accompanied with a series of *miraculous operations*, would not this clear up the matter, and satisfy them, of the divine commission?

ALLOW that the things themselves (I suppose he means, *commanded*) must direct our judgment whether miracles are from *good* or *evil beings*: and that

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no command can come from a Being infinitely good and wise, but what is *good* and *wise*: May there not be both *wisdom* and *goodness* in such a command? And though such a proceeding, in *ordinary* cases, may be inconsistent with the duties owing to men *as men*, yet in the then state of things in the world, and the particular case, it might be very consistent with the duties owing both to *God* and *men*. It might be for the good of the world, though not of the sufferers themselves. *Joshua* and the *Elders of Israel*, might be satisfied from the knowledge of *circumstances*, which we at this distance cannot have, that it was neither inconsistent with wisdom nor goodness in God, nor *any duty* men *as men* owe to one another. In which case, *miracles* would be a very good evidence, that their commission was from God.

It is notorious, that these people were guilty of gross *polytheism* and *idolatry*, of making their children pass through the fire to *Moloch*, of *incestuous* mixtures, of *sodomy*, *bestiality*, &c. to the reproach of human nature, and injury of society. These heinous sins were common amongst them. The *nations* about them were addicted to *like* practices, though, perhaps, not to the *same degree*. All mankind, but those who, with *our author*, think God is *meer* goodness, and void of all displeasure at the sins of men, must esteem such practices *very* provoking to him. Was it *utterly unfit* for God, in this state of things, to interpose, and, in some *extraordinary* way, shew his displeasure against such *offences* and *offenders*? Nay, is it not manifestly *fit*, that the supreme ruler should sometimes *interpose* in the course of his providence, and shew mankind that he *concerns* himself in human affairs, and is not a *meer* regardless looker-on? And, when they, to an heinous degree, slight both the *law* of reason and the *reproach* of conscience, the natural sanction
by

by which it is enforced, that he should call them to reflection, by some *external significations* of his displeasure, more likely, in such circumstances, to affect them? May not infinite wisdom think this both right in *it-self*, and for the *general good* of the world? And might not the leaders of *Israel*, upon a knowledge of circumstances, think this a *fit* season for such interposure? And knowing, that God might employ *what* instruments he pleased in such an affair, surely, if, by many and undoubted *miracles*, he plainly shewed, that he gave them commission to be *such* instruments, as he *had* power to give, *they* had a right to act by such commission, and do what he commanded. If the *command* were lawful, they could not transgress in obeying it? And where, by *miracle*, they were certified, *this* was a divine command, they broke no law of nature, they did *no injury* to their fellow-creatures, nay they did *good* to the world, in destroying such sinners out of it, on a plain *divine commission*; tho' *without* such warrant, or on meer *pretence* of it, they had acted inconsistently with *all* the duties men, as men, owe to one another, by invading and destroying *this* people.

BUT in this case it is farther to be considered, that as the *Israelites* were, by undoubted miracle, saved from the *Egyptians* at the *Red-Sea*, and miraculously subsisted in the waste and barren wilderness, for forty years, upon the very borders of *Canaan*; so the *Canaanites* knew their miraculous deliverance from *Egypt*, and their commission to invade them: and doubtless knew their being on their borders, and of the spies having been in *Canaan*. Nor can it be thought but they had often spies among the *Israelites*, to learn both their *motions* and *purposes*. And since for so long a time, the judgment, of which they had notice, was respited, had they not been *hardened* sinners, they would

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have either repented, or removed to other habitations, and not gone on in their sins, and continued to dwell in *Canaan*, in defiance of divine displeasure. But it is probable because of their own *gigantick stature*, and fortified towns, they contemned the power of the *Israelites*, tho' they knew they were coming to destroy them with a divine commission; and, in so doing, *bid defiance* to God himself.

CERTAIN it is, the *Israelites* had no great heart for this undertaking. Without manifest miracles from heaven, to confirm the orders they were to execute, and support their courage, they would hardly have invaded *Canaan*, as much as they needed a settlement. And when they did invade it, was not their way made into the country, by the *miraculous parting of Jordan*? Was not *Jericho*, their first conquest, taken by miracle? And if the *Canaanites* had known nothing of their commission before, was it not sufficiently opened and proclaimed, in the desolation of that city? Did not the *Gibeonites* take this right? And might not the rest have done so too? So that, for the sake of a *ludicrous criticism*, this author needed not have carried us, to the miracle of the *sun's standing still*. The parting of *Jordan*, and miraculous downfall of the walls of *Jericho*, and the destruction made of it, sufficiently shewed the rest of the *Canaanites*, what they were to expect, and by whose commission the *Israelites* acted. So that here is no room for ^h his two opposite rights, at least if God's commission to the *Jews* took from the *Canaanites* their right of self-defence. They had proof of the commission, that was plain enough. And when they had, and could not be ignorant of the reasons for it, resistance to the *Israelites* was opposing their divine commission. And certainly their duty, in the case, was, not to have fought against God, nor the instruments of his displeasure;

pleasure, but to have *bumbled* themselves for their sins, thrown themselves on the *mercy* of God, if peradventure he would have *been gracious*, and suffered them either to *incorporate* with his own people, or peaceably *remove* to another habitation.

BUT, says, he, "If God has a right to punish a *sinful people*, has he not a *thousand ways* of doing it, without commanding men to do, *what* by the law of nature he has *forbid* them?" What is that? To act in disobedience to a command of his? Or only to do, *what*, without such command, he had forbidden? A *civil* magistrate forbids a *private* man to cut off another man's head, however criminal. The same magistrate calls out the *same private* man, to cut off a criminal's head, by him *legally* sentenced to such a death. Would he now be an offender against the first *prohibition*? I should humbly conceive, he would not. And if God passes a *sentence of destruction* on a *sinful people*, and calls out another people to *execute* this sentence, and gives them a plain and satisfactory signification of his pleasure in the case, why must they, by doing this execution, go against any prohibition of the law of nature? Whether the *Israelites*, had such a signification and a warrant from God, attested by *miracles*, cannot be questioned by those who credit their history.

To say these miracles were not *divine*, but wrought by some *evil Being*, is to say, that such evil Being was concerned, in this manner, to establish a religion, intended to destroy *idolatry*, and the worship of *false Gods*, and set up and maintain the worship of the only *living and true* God, and promote obedience to the law of nature in all its branches, as that of the *Jews* certainly was. And it is out of doubt, that the same Being who gave them *their law*, miraculously subsisted them in the

wilderness, and settled them in Canaan. If this God were the living and true God, from him was their commission. And if he had power to give them such commission, they could be no transgressors of the law of nature, in the execution of it. In these circumstances, they were by no law of nature forbidden (I don't say to murder) but to destroy a people, sentenced by God to destruction, "though they never did them injury." No not the children amongst them; unless God has no right to take away children lives, because they are innocent. Which to say, were to arraign his daily proceedings in common providence. And if he has a right to take away their lives, by a natural death, or by pestilence, famine, wild beasts, &c. why not by the sword and the hands of men? If he has a right to take away their lives, has he not an equal right to chuse the instruments? Is their innocence a reason why men should not take away their lives? What innocence towards God or towards men? If the latter, according to him, neither men nor women were nocent towards Israel, any more than their children. Yet it is to be hoped, that from what has been said, the Israelites were no transgressors of the law of nature, by executing God's sentence on them? And if he had power to sentence their children to death, why should they be more transgressors in this case, than the former? God thought fit, in those circumstances, to cut off this whole people from the earth, which could not be done without destroying their offspring? Did he owe them their lives? No. Could he then do them wrong, by taking them off? Not, I suppose, if he had done it himself. And why might he not, if he pleased, do it by instruments? Could they be criminal, by executing his righteous sentence. If "God has a thousand ways of punishing a sinful people, what then?" Is not he the proper judge of the manner of doing, what he has a right to do? Must he take

take no measures, which do not approve themselves to *this author's* wisdom? How weak upon the whole is what he says, in the close of this paragraph, "If God punished the *Canaanites*, for acting contrary to the law of nature, would he require the *Israelites* to act contrary to the law of nature, in murdering men, women and children, who never did them the least injury?" By the same argument he may prove the executioner in every country a murderer, and a transgressor of the laws which forbid murder. But [†] he adds,

"If God designed what he did to be a terror to others, would he not act after such a signal and supernatural manner, as all should see that it was his own doing, and the reason of his so doing; and in order to it, distinguish between the guilty and the innocent?" This was certainly done in *terrorem*. And God did so signally and supernaturally appear in it, that all might see it was his own doing. And the reasons of his so doing, were very plain in themselves, and were sufficiently declared antecedently to the execution: ¹ For the land was defiled by the abominations of the inhabitants, therefore did God visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land it-self vomiteth out her inhabitants. And God's employing *Israel* in this matter was certainly with a view to deter them from idolatry, to which, as *this author* observes, they were too prone. It was but natural for them to expect like treatment, if they were guilty of like sins. And by this very consideration are they warned of God to avoid them: ^m Ye shall not commit any of these abominations, lest the land spew you out also, when you defile it, as it spewed out the nations that were before you. Nor were they perfectly cured of the idolatrous humour, till the land had, in a sort, spewed them out: till the ten tribes were quite transplanted, and the other two were carried captive into *Babylon*. Which

Which may account for God's employing a people prone to idolatry, in executing his vengeance on other idolaters; especially when amongst them he intended to set up and maintain the worship of the true and living God: which to ^a him seems an absurdity.

NOR was it necessary, as ^a he suggests, to convince the world, that judgment was executed on idolaters, in this conquest of *Canaan*, that the *Jews* should have no private interests in this matter. It is true, on their leaving *Egypt*, they needed another settlement, and they were brought out thence to settle in *Canaan*. And God had a double view herein, to make good his promise to their fathers, the fulfilling which, was suspended till the iniquity of this people were full, when they also were to be cut off. The *Jews* never pretended that it was merely to execute God's vengeance on idolaters, that they invaded *Canaan*. And it is hardly possible, that pure, disinterested zeal for God, should move such a body of men, to go through with such an undertaking, without any mixture of selfish regards. And yet, as has been observed, want of a settlement had never prevailed with them to proceed, had not miracles led the way, and made their conquest easy. But the end of God in it, is plain and plainly declared, his interest and appearance in it as signal and supernatural, as if he had burnt them up with fire from heaven, destroy'd them with pestilence, inundation, famine, or any other such unusual way, if not more so. And the *Israelites* were more likely to be affected with their destruction, in which themselves were instruments, and to be taught, that like sins would bring on them like punishments.

THE question therefore which he ^p tells us some would make, "whether the plea of a divine command

“mand here, if taken *literally*, will not destroy all
“the *internal* proofs of the *falsehood* of any reli-
“gion?” seems a needless one. Why should it?
Why, “Can that which is consistent with the truth
“of any one religion, prove another false?” No,
what then? “Do not all *divines*, when speaking
“against other religions, maintain, that their
“commanding or approving any thing contrary to
“the law of nature, is a demonstration of their
“*falsehood*? since it destroys all the *internal* proofs
“of the truth of any religion, and confounds all
“the *essential marks* by which we discern good from
“evil; and supposes God may command a son to
“sacrifice his father, or do any thing, how repugnant
“soever to the light of nature.” To what pur-
pose is this talk? Then the *Jewish* religion is false.
Why? Because it commands or approves somewhat
repugnant to the law of nature. Why? Because it
commanded the *Jews* to invade *Canaan*, and de-
stroy the *Canaanites*, in breach of the law of nature.
Whether it were so or no, has been sufficiently con-
sidered. Though God has given us a law, founded
in the *nature* of things, and guarded it with proper
sanctions, he has not divested himself of his rights as
sovereign ruler, nor tied up himself, from punish-
ing notorious breaches of it another way, when the
natural sanctions have lost all their force with men.
If for wise and good ends, of which himself is a
proper judge, he thinks fit to do it, he may. And
the manner of punishing is surely as much in his
choice, as the punishment it-self is in his rightful
power. If he will employ men as his instruments,
what wrong does he or they do herein? Indeed they
must not, for any private interests of their own, pre-
tend to a divine commission when they have none, nor
presume they have one when they have not; but
when they wait for a signification of the divine will
in the case, and have this attested by proper vouchers,
they

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they may do, what, *without this*, would be a violation of the law of nature. The *Israelites* did no more. How then does their religion command, what is *repugnant* to the law of nature?

It would be indeed a very great and *invincible* objection, to the truth of *any* religion, to find it requiring *children* to sacrifice their *parents*, or *parents* their *children* as a general or stated duty. Yet there may be cases put, wherein *one* or *other* may be requisite, and *without* any violation of the law of nature, complied with. Suppose the *father* a capital offender, and that God had *wise* and *good* ends in taking away his life, and in calling out his *son* to execute justice on him; I cannot see, that *any* law of nature would be violated by him in the case. Though it would be barbarous in *civil rulers*, to make *children* ordinarily the executioners of criminal *parents*; yet there may be *fit reasons* why, in some particular cases, they may be called out to this office. And for my part, I cannot see, that in such case, they would be *breakers* of any natural law.

BUT I take this to be a *side-blow* at God's command to *Abraham* to sacrifice *Isaac*, if not at the *Jewish* religion; which, he had^a before endeavoured to prove, allowed of *human sacrifice*, tho' without all foundation, as is plain to any one who reads the *Levitical law*. It will not be improper therefore to set this matter in a fair light.

THAT God is the great *Lord of life*, as well as *giver* of it, is, methinks, a point indisputable. Where any *promise* to the contrary, intervenes not, he may prolong or shorten it at pleasure. He is doing *thus*, every day, in the common course of providence? A proof that, in our present state, there is no such *intervening promise*. And as he may take away any of his creatures lives at pleasure, he may also do it by *what instruments*

^a Page 81, 82, &c.

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ments he pleases. Methinks this also should be out of question. He has indeed, for the general *weal* of the world, implanted a strong affection and good will to their children, in *all* parents. And this, more than any *obligations* of the natural law, is what, in most parents, prompts a concern for them. They are their dearest property. They cannot bear to *hurt*, or see them *hurt*. For a parent to embroe his hands in a child's blood, looks not only unnatural, but *shocking*. To do such a thing in a *transport* of rage, upon reflection, stabs to the heart. Who can do it in *cold blood*, even leaving out all consideration of the natural law, and its obligation? And how *powerful* must those principles of religion be, that would induce a parent, *against* all these counter-tendencies of nature, to make an offering of a *child*; out of *obedience* to God? There is no danger that any *good* parent should do or offer to do it, without a *plain warrant*. Both nature and natural duty will restrain. But this command being once made *clearly known*, he who owns God's superior and absolute property in him and his, can have no room to dispute the lawfulness of such a command; nor to plead *nature* or *natural duty* against it, since the most natural and reasonable duty of all, is to yield obedience to the plain will of God. And therefore, what this author makes a reproach to *Abraham*, "that he was *ready* to sacrifice his son, *without* the least expostulation, though he "was importunate with God to save an *inhospitable*, "idolatrous (which is more than he knows) and *incestuous* city," was really a great commendation of his faith and obedience. For he who had so long been favoured with *divine converse*, could not be ignorant, whether *this* command were from God or no.

WHAT

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WHAT is there more absurd in this *moral* conduct of the divine being, than his suspending the laws of the *natural world*, and making their operations and effects variant from what is usual? Because in *both cases* he has settled laws for the regulation of his creatures conduct or operation, must he have bound himself never to depart from them in things not invariably in their own nature evil? Is there any *absurdity* or *unfitness*, in his shewing himself *lord of nature*, by acting differently from the *ordinary* rules of nature, on occasions that to him seem proper? And why should there be more absurdity, if in the *moral world*, on occasions that seem proper to him, he suspends *pro tempore*, the obligation of a particular law of nature? There is a vast odds, between doing this, and making a transgression of a natural law, a *branch of standing duty*. Divines would rightly say, that a religion cannot be from God, that requires men to *live* in breach of any law of nature. Frequent interruptions in the *course of nature*, would breed confusion, spoil the beauty of the universe, and long continued would *change* the *course of nature*. The like may be said in the *moral world*, were this the case. But to suspend *pro tempore*, the obligation of a particular law, in its own nature not invariable, to serve *valuable ends*, breeds no confusion, changes not the *nature* of things, nor *laws of nature*; but only *shews*, that the world's sovereign acts, by authority independent, in giving laws to his creatures: which *this author* will never be able to prove is a thing unbecoming him, as the *wise and good* governour of the world.

ESPECIALLY when the good of the *persons*, in whose case the law is suspended, and the good of *mankind* is intended in it. Which was certainly the case of *Abraham's* offering his son, and *Isaac's* offering himself included in it. For it does not appear,

pear, that this was to be done, whether *Isaac* were consenting, or no. Nor seems this to have been possible, none being present to assist in the sacrifice besides the father and son, the servants being ordered to stay behind, and *Isaac* being at this time in his full youth and strength: The one consented to be the sacrifice, the other the sacrificer, because God had given such command. That law of nature, which ordinarily forbids the parent to take away the child's life, or the child to consent to such a deed, being *pro tempore* suspended, to set forth *Abraham*, more especially to all generations, as an example of the power of religious principles, of faith and of the fear and love of God. For which wise and good ends, the Lord of nature had certainly a power to make such suspension. And if *Abraham* thought himself, by the law of nature, to have power over his child's life, which has been the sentiment of some nations, though I cannot think it a right thought, the performance of the divine command would appear to him less difficult. And yet the angel's stopping him, when his hand was stretched out to give the mortal wound, was a plain signification from heaven, that such sacrifices, in ordinary cases, were not acceptable to God. It was not the sacrifice, but the proof of *Abraham's* faith and duty, that was chiefly in view, and that was required only for the sake of this. But I hope enough has been said to shew, that this act, as circumstanced, was no transgression of the law of nature, nor any prejudice to the credit of the Jewish religion, that it is therein reported to be done by divine command.

In what has been said, most of his exceptions, with regard to other passages of scripture, interfering, as he thinks, with the law of nature, have been obviated. But a few things more will not be here improperly hinted, to remove these difficulties.

First,

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First, It is very unnatural to suppose there should be any thing in the sacred writings of the Jews countenancing immorality, or any thing repugnant to the laws of nature, seeing their law was plainly given to promote a regard to every branch of it. The whole duty which reason requires, with regard to God, ourselves and others, is enjoined by it: every natural branch of piety, justice, goodness and sobriety. The voice of the Jewish law and the gospel, are in this respect the same. Our Saviour telling us in his sermon, wherein he rectifies many wrong notions of the Jews, about the meaning and extent of it, that he came not to destroy the law of God, but fulfil it. And the prophet Micah, in the summary he gives us of what God required, says, *what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God?* Can it be thought that divine writers under this law, can deliver any thing to countenance injustice, fraud, cruelty, &c. in flat contradiction to these duties? Not, certainly, without charging them with manifest inconsistency. This author may be fond of fastning such a charge on them, but those who read them as divine, can never put an interpretation on them, implying such a charge. If they relate any instances of this kind, it is as meer narrative, without any design of commending them; though persons, otherwise of great and good character in them, may have been guilty. All men have their imperfections. And it is not their example, but the law, which is the rule of life. Departures from this, even in them, are faulty, and to be avoided by others. And history must be told as the facts are, if it be told at all. If a divine writer of history tells the faults of good men, they are nevertheless faults, nor can the historian be fairly supposed to approve or commend them, because he reports them, or reports them as the actions of otherwise good men; no, not though

they may have been attended with *happy events*, God often over-ruling the sins of men for serving his purposes. All that the *divine historian* is answerable for, is the truth of the fact. His bare telling it, is *no hint* of his approbation. And to make the *divine historians* countenance any *evil*, is to make them cross their own design.

Secondly, The *scripture narration* is very *short and concise*, rather *hint* than *history*; abstracts, as *this author* tells us, of larger histories. Now, to judge of the *morality* of any action, a knowledge of *all circumstances* is necessary: actions that hardly seem *excusable*, in the view in which they stand, might appear *commendable* and *highly virtuous*, were we fully apprized of all circumstances. At least, without better knowledge of *these*, it may be *rash* to condemn them; but it is much *worse* than *rash* to suppose, they will countenance actions in us, that are certainly criminal. Men are not to argue, in a point of *practice*, from examples, where from *ignorance* of circumstances, they may conclude wrong, but from the *law* which is to direct their practice, and the *reason* of things. This *author* condemns *David* of cruelty in his treatment of the *Ammonites*, from the bare history; without having any light into the *circumstances* of the case, or the springs of action, which certainly is very *rash judgment*. The like is to be said of his censure of *Elijah* for consuming the captain and his fifty, and *Elisha* for cursing the children at *Bethel*, without any knowledge of the circumstances, though he can *feign* circumstances, which do not offer in the story; telling us, that the captains were destroyed by *Elijah*, merely for *delivering* a message from their king, and perhaps in his *own words*.

Thirdly,

Page 238.

2 Kings i.

Page 239.

1 Chron. xi. 3.

Ch. ii. 23, 24.

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Thirdly, In the first ages of the church, and under the Jewish state, God did in a manner supernatural converse with men, and communicate his mind to men, which he does not in our age of the world. And many actions, by this interposition, may be warranted, for which men, left to the ordinary conduct of reason and revelation, can have no authority. We must in no instance go against our rule. But God, as has been shewn, is not limited by this rule. He can in some cases, when he has good reasons for it, over-rule, and authorize men to act in a manner different from it. And in that age, when he did communicate his mind to men in a way supernatural, they were warranted to do as he bade them. His commission and orders were a sufficient warrant, for what they did. And if they acted not without it, they could not act wrong. But for any without such warrant to act like them, would be very wrong; such extraordinary actions being no rule to men now, who must only follow reason, and the plain direction of scripture, and not reason themselves, in other circumstances, authorized to do what others did in those circumstances. When God immediately directs, this direction is to be followed. When reason and the rule left us by revelation from him, only direct us, we must keep to them, and do ill when we deviate from them. So that there is no danger, of persons being led into any breaches of the law of nature by such extraordinary instances recorded in scripture. If Pharaoh, by extraordinary impulse and suggestion, slew Zimri and Cosbi in their transgression, Ebed Nabeo slew Eglon king of Moab, Jael nailed Sisera to the head, when she had hospitably received him in her tent, and were blameless, because they acted on a divine warrant, of which they had certain and undoubted evidence; yet this will bear out none in our

our age of the world; when God signifies his mind to men, in no such extraordinary method, but only by the ordinary rules of life, the dictates of reason and directions of revelation. The like is to be said of many other instances, in this author's account, so very apt to mislead. Actions extraordinary and in circumstances peculiar, are not to be imitated, nor do Christians, nor did Jews heretofore, think them such as might.

Fourthly, God, as this author observes, was in a peculiar manner king of the Jews, their civil head and ruler. As such it was necessary, that his mind should be communicated to them, in a way extraordinary. And this was done either by the priest answering by Urim and Thumim, by prophets trained up in schools, to receive revelations, by vision, dream, voice, &c. who had certain knowledge when the revelation was from God. Every thing relating to their laws, choice of their magistrates, peace and war, was as he commanded. So that, as Josephus calls it, their polity, was a proper Theocracy, God was their king. He raised up judges, and sometimes inspired them. When they would have a king, though he was displeased at it, he chose the person, he qualified him for the office, he directed him in the administration. Saul their first king, upon his choice, had another spirit and prophesied, and Samuel the prophet was living during most of his reign, to direct him from God. David and Solomon were themselves prophets. And in the reigns of most of their kings, who were not prophets themselves, there were yet prophets of God to direct them what to do. It is plain from hence, that the people and kings of Israel, acted under such direction from God, as no other kings or people ever did. Nor can what they did, under such direction, ever countenance like proceedings.

in *others*, without such direction. So that what he suggests, "That no prince can ever want a pretence, of going to war, and totally extirpating those he invades, when he sees Saul was commanded by God, to destroy the *Amalekites*, men, women, infants, &c." is so far from being true, that no prince can have such pretence, till, as Saul was, he has been anointed captain over the *Land* inheritance, and from a prophet, the proper signifier of his sovereign's will, has received orders to act in like manner. Nor would any people destitute of an habitation, think, what the *Israelites* did to the *Canaanites*, a good precedent to invade a neighbouring idolatrous nation, &c. till they were in the same circumstances, had God standing in the same relation to them, and giving them commission and orders for so doing. And when he adds, "I question whether the *Spaniards* would have murdered so many millions in the *Indies*, had they not thought, they might have used them as *Canaanites*?" is his not questioning the matter, a proof of the fact? And if this were fact, and the *Spaniards* did murder so many millions upon this supposition, had they according to his state of the case a good precedent for so doing? Were they ever God's inheritance? Did they need a settlement in a neighbour's country, who have in a great measure dispeopled their own to new plant that? Were they sent of God on such an errand? Did they pretend such a commission? And did God by miracles, support these pretensions? What then, is his not questioning in the case, but an evidence, of his confidence, without any foundation to support it?

And what prophets, and kings acting under their direction, did by divine command, was, as this author well knows, properly speaking, God's doing. When

Elisha

Elisha cursed the children of *Bethel* who mocked him, it was *God's* curse he pronounced: and when *Elijah* called for fire from heaven to consume the captains and their fifty, it was *God* sent it. It was he destroy'd them, as he sent the bears upon *Elijah's* curse, to rend the children on their mockery. So that if there be any blame in the case, it must in the end be thrown on *God*. When he bid them curse, or call down fire from heaven, if they did it, they had his authority for so doing. If it was evil, he authorized it. And this every one sees with half an eye, and this author saw it, and therefore, tho' coverily, as we shall presently see, makes it matter of accusation against *God*. But every one who has becoming notions of *God*, will plainly see, that the prophets in these instances, did but their duty. Indeed to curse without a commission from *God*, is an heinous evil, and in a peculiar manner so in a christian, who should bless and curse not; and to do this in the name of *God*, without any warrant from him, is horrid profaness. But to do it with a commission from *God*, is only to deliver and denounce his curse, who has a right to give it out, whenever to his wisdom it shall seem meet, and who only can curse effectually. But this author is little better than outrageous, when, upon *Elijah's* cursing the children, and his servant *Gehazi*, and *David's* supposed cruelty to the *Ammonites*, and *Elijah's* calling for fire from heaven, and praying that it might not rain for three years, which was certainly done by divine direction, he dares to say, "that the holier men in the old testament are represented, the more cruel they seem to be, and the more addicted to cursing." Does it appear that men are addicted to cursing, because once or twice, such good men have denounced curses in the name of *God*, which he made good, and by warrant from

him denounced judgment, which he executed, or called for them by the same warrant. And the instances alleged amount to no more, except in David's treatment of the *Ammonites*, which is barely reported by the divine writer, without giving us any light into the secret springs of it, concerning which therefore there is no sufficient ground to pronounce. If it were *exactly*, it gives no foundation for his inference, that the *holier men* are represented, they seem to be the more *severe*. It has by some been thought to have been done whilst David was in his state of imprisonment for his sin with *Bathsheba*. And he might as justly have inferred, that the *holier men* are represented, the more addicted they seem to adultery and murder. Are these represented as any instances of David's holiness? Some think it was to avenge the insult offered to his *embassadors*, whose persons have ever been deemed sacred, and rebuke the proud *Ammonites*, a very insolent people. To me it does not look improbable, that it was to punish them for their abominable idolatry and inhuman sacrifices to *Moloch* or *Malcom*, the vulgate translating *Malkin*, which we render *Brick-kiln*, *furnaces in Moloch*, and others thinking this was means of the place of his worship. But all his *conjecture*. And from a fact, where the circumstances are unknown, no certain conclusions can be drawn, nor can any certain judgment be formed of it.

Possibly, The people of *Israel*, were much addicted to idolatry, and a very stubborn and rebellious people, and it is no wonder, if the dispensation was suited to this disposition, and carried in it some peculiar tokens and influences of severity. They, in conformity to their temper and disposition, were moved to their duty by fear. And severe punishments were often inflicted upon them, to awaken their fears: as

many transgressions of theirs made them liable to excision, without admitting atonement. Which makes the apostle tell the Jews at Antioch in Pisidia, that those who believe in Christ, were justified from all things, from whence they could not be justified by the law of Moses. The Jewish state was the state of the church in minority, in which the child, though an heir, differs little, as the apostle says, from a servant. And therefore, They were in bondage under the elements of the world. And in this respect there was indeed a contrast, as he expresses it, between the spirit of the old testament and the new. The one is called the spirit of bondage unto fear, but the other the spirit of adoption whereby christians are enabled to call God father. The Jewish dispensation represented God as a sovereign jealous of his honour and rights, and making this appear by severe animadversions and punishment for their sins, which such stubborn transgressors seemed to need. Under the gospel he appears more as a gracious and forgiving father, drawing to himself by the bands of a man and bonds of love.

But there is no room for such a contrast as he would insinuate, by a quotation from Archbishop Tillotson, concerning the ancient *Mandichæans*, that the God of the old testament and the God of the new, were two Gods, one evil, fierce and cruel; the other kind, good and merciful. In which, though severely, he insinuates a charge against the God of Israel, and therefore the God of christians too, seeing he is undoubtedly the same, as fierce and cruel. And no other sense can be put on his former saying, that the *holier men* were under the old testament, the more cruel, especially as supported by the instances of *Elijah* and *Elisha*. For if these prophets were guilty of cruelty, in the instances mentioned, God who

¹ Acts xiii. 38.

² Gal. iv. beg.

³ Page 246.

⁴ Rom. viii. 15.

⁵ Page 241.

gave them orders for what they did, and executed that wrath they denounced, must have been *truth*. They were not to be blamed, but *he*. And some other instances, alledged by him, speak to the same purpose, and make God *unjust* as well as *cruel*, punishing the *innocent* for the *guilty*, and breaking in on the common course of nature, to punish men for crimes of which they are *not guilty*; instancing in the famine of three years for the *crime* of Saul and his bloody house, in slaying the Gibeonites; and the *destruction* of the seventy thousand of Israel, for David's fault, in causing the *innocent* sheep, as David, it seems, justly calls them, to be numbered. In this last instance we have a double specimen of his unfairness. He makes David call the *Israelites* innocent sheep; *sheep*, indeed, he calls them, and in aggravating his own offence, cries, *I have sinned, I have done wickedly, but these sheep what have they done?* He calls them not innocent. But is not this expression tantamount? No surely. David could not deliberately call the people of Israel in general innocent, who had so generally rebelled against himself both under Absalom, and Sheba, just before, and it is highly probable, were guilty of great abuse of the plenty which succeeded the *three year* famine. But David deeply affected with his own guilt, overlooks *their*, condemns himself as the chief offender, and perhaps thought the numbering the people the *only sin* visited at that time, the guilt of which was his own indeed. But that Israel was not guiltless, the very history assures us, it being ushered in with this; *Again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, for which reason he left David to humour his vanity in this particular, called hereby for a reason afterward explained, moving David against them, to give orders for the numbering them.* What

Whatever were the *special sin* that had given provocation, yet the people are here plainly laid, to have been punished thus for crimes of *their own*. So that here is no punishment of the *innocent* for the *guilty*, no breaking in upon the *course of nature*, to punish men for crimes of which they were *not guilty*.

THAT of the *three years famine*, is said indeed to be for *the slaughter of the Gibeonites*, by Saul and his bloody house, nor is there any sin of the people intimated, as a reason for it besides. But *Abarnahel*, as bishop *Patrick* observes, thinks that the *Israelites* were now punished, because they did perhaps approve of this slaughter, at least did not endeavour to prevent it, by putting him in mind of the oath made to them. Though I think there is an intimation of other crimes, in the talk of *Saul's bloody house*; his sons, it is probable, had many of them stained their hands also in blood, nor had any yet called them to justice for it. And God would now by famine awaken to a sense of their criminal indulgence, and bring such *heinous offenders* to justice. Nor can it be thought but there was guilt enough in *Israel*, for God to visit in this manner, and withhold the common bounties of providence, though he made it an occasion for doing this justice, on *Saul and his bloody house*.

INDEED he tells us, but with a sneer, "he dares not call these proceedings a spirit of cruelty." But goes on with the same charge of *injustice* on God for threatening in the *decalogue*, to visit the iniquities of the fathers, on their children, to the third and fourth generation, of them that hate him. Which, the *Jewish* writers well observe, is to be understood of children, persisting in their father's sins *impunitently*, and this for the father's punishment, it being threatened only to the third or fourth generation, to which parents may live, and see their offspring, and

smart

smart themselves, in their punishment, and this only in case of idolatry, or violation of this command; which was not only an act of great impiety which God punished so severely in the wicked *Canaanites*, but in them was *disloyalty* and *high-treason* against God their king? And what is there in this, that carries any intimation of injustice or cruelty?

As to the story of *Achan*, which he brings to the same purpose, or, to prove the God of the *Jews* was so cruel, as to punish the innocent for the guilty, I shall only desire the reader to observe, that it is not certain that the sons and daughters of *Achan*, though brought forth into the valley of *Achor* before all *Israel*, were there stoned with him, in which case, the charge is destitute of all foundation. That if they were, he can never prove they were *guiltless*. *Achan's* plunder was hidden in the *mist* of his tent. It is probable at least, that some, if not all his children were privy to this concealment. This was *misprision of treason* in the case, and then they did not die innocent. But supposing this should be made out, and that they indeed knew nothing of the matter, and so were wholly innocent of this particular crime, can this author prove that none of them had, by *personal* crimes, forfeited their lives into the hands of God? If this were the case, might he not take this occasion, to cut them off together with their father, by such an instance of *severity*, to impress the whole people the more with his commands, and move them to pay a *punctual* regard to them, and be very cautious, in no respect, to transgress his orders? Say that it was *severe*, there was no *injustice* in it, much less *cruelty* towards the sufferers, and to the rest of *Israel*; considering their *ferocious* disposition, and how necessary *fear* was to keep them to their duty, it might be an act of great goodness.

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 JOSH. vii. 24. VER. 25. 2. VER. 26.

But the former is utterly mistaken, when she tells us that the nearer we come to the gospel, the milder the spirit appears, because it is said in the prophet, *the soul that sinneth, it shall die; but the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father.* It will appear plainly to you, that there is no change of the spirit, but merely rectifying a mistake of the Jews. It is giving them an assurance that those children, who did not proceed in the wicked ways of their parents, should not die utterly for sins committed by them. That this is implied even in the threatening annexed to the second commandment, the Jewish writers suppose. And that they have foundation for it in their law, seems plain to me, for that it is said as a sort of denunciation of God's judgments for their walking contrary to him, particularly their idolatry, the sin of those that hate him, in the second commandment, yet when they sinned away in their iniquities and the iniquities of their fathers, if they did confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers, God would remember his covenant with their fathers, and remember their land. Which shews that repentance of their father's sins, and not making them their own by living in them themselves, would preserve them from the visitation threaten'd. And then the talk in the prophet, is no new promise, much less is it from a new and better spirit, but a meer correction of their injurious proverb, that the fathers had eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth were set on edge.

But when in opposition to this, she tells us, that "before it was plain that the son did bear the iniquity of his father," by God's declaring to Abraham, that the uncircumcised man-child was to be cut off from his people; yet it does not appear any punishment was to be inflicted on the parents,

for

“for not circumcising him:” Nothing is here plain, but his confident putting a sense on scripture to his own purpose. It being the unanimous sense, I believe, of interpreters, that this excision was not for the neglect of the parent, but the child’s own neglect, when of proper age, which a bishop Patrick fixes at thirteen years, to which time the descendants of *Ismael* deferred this rite, he being of that age, as they think, when first circumcised. And though the parent who neglects this rite, be not here expressly threaten’d with excision, it may be implied. And that passage in the history of *Moses*, where the angel is reported to have met him, on his way to Egypt, and threaten his life, with the circumstances of *Zipporah*’s circumcising her son to save his life, carries plain proof in it, that this neglect was criminal, in the parents, and makes it probable, at least, that they were, for it, liable also to excision. But he has not done with his exceptions. And,

Fourthly, The language of scripture is such as would shake the credit of revelation itself, according to his account of the matter. For it,

First, INTIMATES that God himself does sometimes deceive his prophets. Reason, says he, is supposed to teach men of the meanest capacity, that God cannot be deceived or deceive us. Right, and what then? “Else the prophet *Jeremiab* had not said, * O Lord thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived? Thou art stranger than I, and hast prevailed.” — “Will thou be altogether to me as a liar? and as waters that fail?” Is not the connexion here, either a very silly sneer, or a malicious intimation, that God, at least the evil God of the Jews, can deceive? did deceive *Jeremiab*, and was a liar to him? But a little attention to the matter, would have

* Vid. in Loc. Gen. xvii. 14. * Exod. iv. 24, &c.

† Page 230, 231. * Jer. xx. 7. * Ch. xv. 18.

have taught him a more decent way of expression, and a more fit sense of the words. What is rendered in the text, *deceived*, is in the margin of our bibles rendered, *enticed*; and if instead of that it had been, *persuaded*, as some render it, *over-persuaded*, there had been no difficulty, and the connexion with the latter part of the verse, is in this way more natural, *thou wast stronger than I, and hast prevailed, viz. with him to take up the prophet's office, so much against his inclination; and, in which, from the beginning he had met with opposition and contempt: Since I spake, viz. in God's name, I ended violence and spoil, the word of God was made a reproach unto me, and a derision daily.*

In the other passage, the prophet, in distress upon a like account, expostulates humbly with God, that his usage from the Jews, did not seem to suit his gracious promise, when he would have excused himself from the office: *Be not afraid of their faces, for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the L. G. D.* Whereas he was now in deep distress, and cries out, *Why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable? Wilt thou be altogether to me as a liar, as waters that fail?* The expression, indeed, in our translation, is not quite so decent. What is rendered *a liar*, properly signifies *frustratio*, and in this sense it more naturally connects with the simile here used, *and as waters that fail*, or unexpectedly dry up. But the putting this in a way of question, implies negation, undoubtedly thou wilt not. Though circumstances are dismal, appearances seem not so suitable to divine promises, Wilt thou altogether fail my hopes? I trust thou wilt not. And to confirm this sense, God presently removes his discouragements, by bidding him return to his duty, and renewing his promise. Expostulations of this kind are frequent in scripture, and shew indeed a conflict between sense and faith,

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faith, duty and difficulty, but the prevalence of the divine principle. Thus the Psalmist, *How God forgotten to be gracious, his mercy clean gone for ever, dost his promise fail for evermore?* But it follows, *I said this is mine infirmity, &c.* Is there any the least colour for his meaning of the words?

In the next passage he refers to, in support of this charge, shews him a very careless or false writer. In another prophet the Lord says, *The days are prolonged, and every vision fails.* Which is no saying of the Lord, but a proverbial saying of the scoffing and hardened Jews; implying that divine threatenings were not executed, but the prophet mistaken. Or if not mistaken, yet as they are introduced saying afterward, *The vision is for many days, he prophesieth of things afar off.* In rebuke of which language God threatens by the prophet, that *none of his words should be prolonged any more (or the execution of his threatenings delayed) but the word be had spoken should be done.* And in opposition to their proverb gives out another, *viz. The days are at hand, and the effect of every vision.* Is there any thing in this to his purpose?

BUT, says he, though God says, *there shall none of my words be prolonged any more, &c.* yet afterwards, he says, *if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the Lord have deceived that prophet.* How these things are connected, no common reader can tell, and therefore if there be any argument in the connection, he cannot take it. But if he be caught with the mere sound of words, without considering the connection of things in the prophet, he may think this passage to his purpose. But if he attends to it, he will quickly perceive, it has nothing to do with his argument. *If the prophet be deceived—What prophet? every prophet, whether he delivers the*

^m Psa. lxxvii. 8, 9, 10. ⁿ Ezek. xii. 22. ^o ver. 27.

^d ver. 23. ^a Page 231. ^e Ezek. xiv. 19.

mind of God, or no? Whether a true prophet or a false one? Who, but to serve an hypothesis, can thus understand the expression? No certainly. We are to understand it of a false prophet, such as he was bid prophesy against in the preceding Chapter: *that prophesied out of their own hearts.* *Who said the Lord saith, when the Lord had not sent him.* *Who saw vanity and divined lies.* *Who dashed with untempered mortar,* *Who set pillows to all graveholes.* &c. and *lied to the people who heard, or hearkened to, lies.* For it immediately follows, *and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him from my people Israel.* And the punishment of the prophet shall be even as the punishment of him that seeketh to him: *that the house of Israel may go no more astray from me, nor be polluted any more with all their transgressions,* &c. Is it not manifest that these were false prophets and seducers? If God deceives them, is this any argument that the prophets favoured with his revelations were deceived?

Is it to be said, if God may deceive any, why not his own messengers? Those who are acquainted with scripture language, will easily account for this way of expression. What God permits even free agents to do, whilst he makes it subservient to his wise and good designs, he is said to do himself. Nay, as he is the first cause, the chief agent throughout the world, and super-intends all affairs, every thing that falls out is ascribed to him, whether it be the immediate effect of his own power, or from the operation of second causes, even free agents. Nothing is done without his concurrence as the first cause, nothing but under his direction as supreme manager. In this sense when he left a false prophet to pursue his own delusions, he is said to deceive that prophet. No more being intended than suffering him to be

every prophet, whether he believe or not.
 Ezek. xiii. 1. ver. 6. ver. 9. ver. 10.
 ver. 12. ver. 19. Ezek. xiv. 9. 10. 11.
 ver. 12. ver. 19. Ezek. xiv. 9. 10. 11.
 ver. 12. ver. 19. Ezek. xiv. 9. 10. 11.

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deceived for wise and righteous ends, which he would serve by it.

In this sense too is his passage from *Jeremy* to be understood^b, *Th. n said I, Ab. Lord, surely thou hast greatly deceived this people, saying, ye shall have peace, whereas the sword reacheth to the soul; that is, suffered them to be deceived by the false prophets, and their own vain and self-flattering hearts, who were pleased with these prophets, for saying smooth things to them.* But it may be read interrogatively, *Hast thou indeed greatly deceived?* &c. And then it implies a strong negation. Verily no. But they have been deluded by their false prophets.

THE same sense is to be put on the passage of *Esaia* cited by him: *Ob Lord, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our hearts from thy fear?* (Though it be not to his purpose, not speaking of proper deception) that is, left us to take our own way and harden our hearts? And few christians understand these passages otherwise, unless they carry their prejudices, in favour of a scheme, to the scriptures with them.

BUT, “ he needs not mention, “ he says, single
“ prophets *deceiving* and being *deceived*, when we
“ read of four hundred being deceived at once, to
“ the destruction of a number of innocent persons:
“ “ I saw, says the prophet *Micaiah*, the LORD sit-
“ ting on a throne, and all the host of heaven standing
“ on his right hand and on his left. And the LORD
“ said, *Who will entice Ahab king of Israel, that he*
“ *may go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead?* And one
“ spake, saying after this manner, and another after
“ that. Then there came out a spirit, and stood be-
“ fore the LORD, and said, I will entice him?
“ And the LORD said to him, *Wherewith?* And
“ he said, I will go and be a lying spirit in the mouth
“ of

^b Jerem. ii. 10.

^a Page 132.

^c Esai. lxiii. 17.

^d 1 King. xxii. 19—23.

“ of all his prophets. And the LORD, said thou
 “ shalt entice him and thou shalt (or wilt) prevail.
 “ Go out and do even so.” That is, thou hast my
 permission to do it.

THIS is plainly either a prophetick vision or pa-
 rable. And allowing for that, what does it import,
 but God’s design to punish *Abab* and *Israel*, for
 their sins, and in order to it to suffer the devil, by
 false suggestions, or their own hearts, by hearkning
 to delusions, to deceive *Abab*’s prophets? Fawn-
 ing parasites, who, to curry favour with the wicked
 king, prophesied to his taste. They were not such
 as consulted God, but humoured their king: “ *A-
 bab*’s prophets, not the prophets of God. For
 when *Jehosaphat* king of *Judah*, who was then with
 him, enquired if there were not a prophet of the LORD
 besides, *Abab* tells him, *there is one man, but I hate
 him because he never prophesieth good to me.* Those
 only were prophets for *Abab*, that would please
 him, sooth him in his wickedness; and this notwith-
 standing, prophesy good to him. And where there
 are real prophets, it is not strange there should be
 pretenders to prophecy: or when princes and
 people are willing to be deceived, that there should
 be deceivers, especially when they can make a
 market of their flattering deceit. Is it any wonder
 that the devil should mislead such pretenders? Or
 that such cheats should prophesy out of their own
 hearts, whether the devil put it into their heads
 or no? And what is there implied in this parable
 more, than that God, for the sin of *Abab*, left
 both him and them to pursue their Inclinations, him
 to be flattered, and them to flatter him, them to
 deceive, and him to be deceived? Must God
 suffer no such deceivers in the world? Must all
 that pretend to prophecy be true prophets? Or
 must all prophets be deceivers, because some are?

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and

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and none be true, because some are false, and abuse those, who are fond of consulting, and prone to believe them? And what, then, is this passage to his purpose? Does it follow, that God's prophets are deceived by him, because he left Ahab's prophets to tell lyes, and deceive their king? Are these prophets fairly to be put on a foot with the divine writers? Is it not mean and shameless to serve a cause with such stuff? Especially when to aggravate the matter, he adds, "that these prophets were deceived, to the destruction of a number of innocent men." It is hard to know, indeed, what is, with him, innocency or nocency. And who these innocent men were, he would be hard put to it to shew, if required. Was Ahab such an innocent? Were the Israelites, so generally corrupted with his idolatry, that *Eliyab* thought himself almost singular in the worship of the true God, innocents? If idolatry, upon his scheme, is no transgression of the law of nature, was it no transgression against God their sovereign, the sovereign, as he tells us, themselves had chosen? Were they not in general guilty of high treason against him, by being the worshippers of *Baal*? Strange power of prejudice! Is this reasoning or spite? Arguing against revelation, or blind and bold calumny and reproach? Such pretenders to reason should state facts rightly, one would think, and forbear abuse. Not to observe, that the same charge may be drawn up against God, in the common conduct of his providence. For how many thousands such innocent persons fall in battle, through the pride, folly, mistake, rashness, &c. of their kings and commanders? And what is there more in the present case?

BEFORE I pass on to the next head of this charge, it may not be amiss to take notice, of what he says of some other scripture-expressions, having affinity with

with these, with which he finds fault, as giving men wrong notions of God. Scripture, says he, talks of God's permitting evil as doing it: *Is there any evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it?* Nay is not the Lord said to have created evil? But by his leave, the bare permission of evil is not at all meant by these phrases. Indeed the wickedness of mankind is not prompted by God, nor acted by him, any farther than by his concurrence as the first cause, in the creature's operation. (And let him try how, without this concurrence, he can account for any voluntary motion of any member, or operation of his own mind.) What of this kind men act, is to be charged to their own account, and this is not God's doing, in the proper sense. But as God is supreme manager throughout the world, he must have the direction of all his creatures actions, to his own wise and good ends. Such concern he must have in all the actions of free agents, or the affairs of the world must run at random, and be under no providential administration. And so all calamities befalling particular persons or societies, are from him; he makes peace, and creates evil. And without making him a meer unconcerned spectator of affairs, this must be attributed to him.

THE like is to be said, of the same actions being attributed to God and Satan. It is said, says he, "that Satan provoked David to number the people, and that God moved him to it, his anger being kindled against Israel. Did God conspire with Satan in this act, in order to destroy a number of innocent people?" To the last clause, reply has been made. To the other it is enough to say, Satan, with divine permission, was the immediate agent, whilst God, as supreme manager of all affairs

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ⁱ Page 303. 304.

^k Am. iii. 6.

^l Isa. xiv. 7.

^m Page 240.

ⁿ 1 Chron. xxi. 1.

^o 2 Sam. xxiv. 1.

^p Page 387.

affairs, had the overruling the act, be to his own
 wife, and good, and righteous ends. And such
 concurrence, or, if he will call it *conspiring*, of God
 with all his creatures in all their actions, he must
 allow, or disown a providence, which is *atheism* in-
 stead of *deism*.

In the same sense God is said to *harden men's*
hearts, by leaving them to themselves, to their sin-
 ful *biasses* and the *counsels* of their own hearts, by
 which they harden themselves. Few christians un-
 derstand it in any other sense. Nor is God repre-
 sented as an *arbitrary Being*, that is, as doing
 what he will, right or wrong, when of children un-
 born, and having done nor good nor evil, he is said
 to *hate the one* and *love the other*, and to *have mercy*
on whom he will, and *harden whom he will*. This
 will fully appear by attending to the apostle's *scope*,
 and the *connection* of his argument. His manifest
 design is to give an account, *why God took the Gen-*
tiles into his church, and *rejected the Jews*, as a nation,
 though they had so long been his peculiar people, and
 gave them up to destruction.

As to the first, he lets them understand, that as
 master of his own favours he had preferred *Jacob*
 and his posterity to be his peculiar people, before
Esau and his descendants, without regard to merit,
 which in this view is all the meaning that can
 fairly be put on the words. They are not to be un-
 derstood of proper hatred, much less of the *particu-*
lar person, (with which the Apostle's design had no
 thing to do) but of an inferior love, which, accord-
 ing to scripture phraseology, is a *comparative hatred*.
 And to this it is subjoined, *for God will have*
mercy on whom he will have mercy, and *have compas-*
sion on whom he will have compassion. That is, he
 show his free favours, his *distinguishing favours*, on
 whom he pleases? There is nothing *arbitrary* in
 this,

this, unless God must make no distinction in his favours at all, but deal out to all mankind an equal portion of good, and favour all alike. How unreasonable this is, has been sufficiently shewn.

As to the other, Pharaoh is brought as a parallel instance, how fitly I might shew at large, but I will wave that as not to the present purpose. He is said to have been raised up of God, that he might shew his power in him, and that his name might be declared throughout the earth: or in other words, that he might be made an example of God's powerful anger against such heinous and stubborn sinners. The providence of God so much interests itself in human affairs, that he may very fitly be said, in the prophet's language, to remove kings and set up kings. And why not to set up Pharaoh for this end? Not to make him wicked, that he might be made an example; but to make him an example, who he knew would be wicked. But why was Pharaoh made such an example? This is to be resolved in to the pleasure of God, who as he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, or bestow his distinguishing favours as he sees good, so whom he will be harden, or suffers to harden themselves, and that under means fitted in their own nature to reclaim them, to make them examples when other tyrants and oppressing rulers are suffered to go off the stage without such unadvisedness. And as Pharaoh heretofore, so the Jews in the time of our Saviour, hardened themselves under means very proper to reclaim them, filled up the measure of their sins, were rejected of God, ceased to be his people, were devoted to destruction, and became a very awful instance how much the long continued abuse of religious privileges provokes God, and exposes us to his vengeance. His hardening whom he will signifies no more, than that he uses his pleasure

whom to make *such* examples among *wicked, wilful* and *stubborn* sinners, whether persons or people. And what is there in this that is *arbitrary*? unless God *must* punish all that are *equal* offenders, or punish them all *alike*, or *not* punish any, and not use more forbearance to *some* than *others*? Which is in effect to say, that he must make *all* examples or *none* examples: that is, *he* must not do what is in the power of every *civil ruler*, who spares some and executes others, who are in the *same* condemnation.

W H A T^u he says of things being referred to God, which are owing to *second causes*, has had, in what has been said, a *sufficient answer*. Second causes have all their power from *him*, and act under *his* direction.

B U T what means he by asking, “how we should know from scripture, what things are immediately owing to God, and what to *second causes*?” Why? “Because every thing that was thought to be *good*, not only the *powers* and *faculties* of men’s minds, but *voluntary actions* themselves are immediately ascribed to God?” How does this appear? Does *scripture language* run always in this strain? Are *no* voluntary actions of men there supposed to be the issue of their *natural faculties* and powers? Why then should *scripture language* mislead us in this matter? Bezaleel it seems, and Aholiab, are said to be filled with the *spirit of wisdom*, because they could *devise cunning works of silver and gold, &c.* But how does it appear that this *cunning and skill*, for all the *curious work* of the tabernacle, &c. was a meer voluntary action, as he speaks, or the *sole* result of their own *natural faculties*? Is it at all likely, that persons brought up in hard servitude, at the *brick-kilns*, should have *heads or hands* turned for this curious workmanship, and

and this all at once? Could they have had any leisure or advantages to have learnt it in the natural way? And is it unreasonable to suppose that they had this skill by inspiration? That it was immediately from God? And what foundation for his talk is there in this instance?

BUT the prophet *Isaiah* says of the ploughman's art, his God does instruct him to discretion, and teach him. And speaking of the *prophet's* art and instruments, says, "This also cometh from the LORD of hosts, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working." And supposing this be the prophet's meaning; does not himself call the dictates of reason the voice of God, and reason itself the light of God shining on the mind? If God shines in this manner on the mind of man continually, what inconsistency is there in supposing the first invention of any useful art might be owing to a divine suggestion? And the general sentiment of mankind through the *heathen* world, who deify'd the first inventors of husbandry, breaths the same sense with the prophet here, tho' in *heathen* language. And how unnatural soever the thought seems to him, no sober reason can condemn it. *Pythagoras* is reported to have offered an *oxen*, on finding out, that a *rectangle triangle* the square of the hypotenuse, was equal to the squares of the opposite sides. Senseless philosopher! to ascribe that to the Deity, which was the meer result of his own faculties. These were indeed the gift of God; but to suppose they had any assistance from him in such an invention, was dishonouring his own reason. How much the light of nature improves in these gentlemen's hands! But to return.

Secondly, He hints, that scripture insinuates, that the prophets of God may utter falsehoods in his name. For this indeed he gives no other instance but that

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of

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of the old prophet at Bethel, which has been already considered: and that of *Elisha's* answer to *Benhadad* king of Syria, who by *Hazael* sent to enquire of him if he should recover of his disease. To which message the prophet replies, *tell him, he may surely recover, howbeit the Lord hath shewed me he will surely die.* And he says it should be rendred, *will surely recover.* But for thus correcting the translation, we must take his bare word: he supports it by no authority. He writes for men of reason, who will take things on trust from him. And to me it looks very odd and unnatural, that such a prophet as *Elijah* should bid the minister of an *heathen* king go and tell his master so gross a lye, for no end in the world, that appears. I doubt he does not understand the original from this single circumstance. As it is here translated, the message was true, he may recover of the disease, that being not mortal, though God had shewn him he would die by *Hazael's* hand. But the *Hebrew* particle *lo*, written with an *aleph*, signifies *non*, and the whole ought to be thus rendred, *Say, thou shalt not surely recover, for the Lord has shewed me he shall surely die.* In which case there is no room for his exception.

Thirdly, He would have us believe, *that the scriptures represent the prophets of God mistaken, in prophecies uttered by them in his name.* To make out this suggestion he tells us, *That Jeremiah prophesied that king Zedekiah should die in peace: and yet, the poor king had his sons slain before his eyes, his own eyes put out, was bound in chains, and died in prison.* But had he quoted the prophecy entire, there had been no room for exception. For it says, *thou shalt surely be taken—and thine eyes shalt behold the king of Babylon—and thou shalt go to Babylon—Yet thus saith the Lord*

^a Vid. pag. 14.

^b Jer xxxiv. 5.

^c Ch. iii. 10, 11.

^d Jer. xxxiv. 3, 4, 5.

of thee, thou shalt not die by the sword, but thou shalt die in peace, and with the burnings of thy fathers — shall they burn vnder for thee, and shall lament thee, saying, &c. What is meant by his dying in peace, is plain upon sight, and has nothing in it contradictory, to his having his eyes put out, or dying in captivity.

ANOTHER instance is *Jeremiah's* prophecy of *Jeboiakim*, that he should die unlamented, and be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn forth and cast without the gates of Jerusalem. "Which," he says, will not at all agree with what is related concerning him, in the last chapter of 2 Kings, nor even with the last chapter of *Jeremiah*. But this shews how apt he is to write at a venture, without consulting the scriptures. In neither of these chapters (which are almost the same throughout) is there a word of *Jeboiakim*. Nothing is in them related concerning him. And sure, nothing there related can disagree with this prophecy of *Jeremiah*. It is in both places related that *Jeboiachin* was, by *Evil-Merodach* King of Babylon, fetched out of prison in the thirty seventh year of his captivity, and treated with much respect by him as long as he lived. But this was the son of *Jeboiakim*, called also *Jecmiah*, against whom *Jeremiah* prophesied in the same chapter, under the name of *Comah*. *Jeboiakim*, as the learned think, never was in Babylon, though taken and put in chains for that purpose. *Abarkinel* thinks he died by the way, and that then *Jeremiah's* prophecy concerning him was fulfilled. But it looks more likely, according to the relation of scripture, that he was either not carried towards Babylon, or else was sent back, and became a tributary to *Nebuchadnezzar*, and afterward rebelled against him, when an army was sent against

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against the land. At which time this prophecy, it is probable, was fulfilled. The scriptures relate nothing of the circumstances of his death, and therefore deliver nothing in contradiction to this prophecy of *Jeremiah*.

BUT the prophecy of the prophetess *Huldah*, concerning good king *Josiah*, was contradicted by the event. How so? She prophesied that he should be gathered to his grave in peace, when yet he died of a mortal wound received in battle. I see no contradiction to the prophecy in this. It was literally fulfilled, this notwithstanding: for he was gathered to his fathers, or buried in one of their sepulchres in peace, all *Judah* and *Jerusalem* making solemn lamentation for him. But this author thought the sound of peace, and wounds received in battle would sound like opposites. And this was to his purpose. But had he cited the prophecy of *Huldah* at large, there had been no appearance of contradiction. For it begins with a threatening, that God would pour out his wrath on the *Jews*, but because *Josiah* humbled himself when God threatened to make *Jerusalem* a desolation and a curse, God promises to gather him to his fathers, and gather him to his grave in peace, so that his eyes should not see the evil God would bring on his people. And so far he died in peace: his country was in peace, *Pharaoh-Necho* had no quarrel with him or his people, in fight against whom he was slain. The *Chaldeans* did not invade the land till some years after his death. So that he saw none of the evils God brought upon them, but died in peace, as far as this prophecy can be fairly made to import. There is no contradiction between the prophecy and the event.

BUT not only were the prophets under the old testament deceived, but the apostles under the new. How

Page 231,

¹ 2 Kings xxii. 20.

² Ch. xxiii. 29.

² Chron. xxxv. 24, 25.

¹ 2 Kings ii. 17. — end.

How so? "The best interpreters and commentators (those who best serve his purpose, *Gregory* only being referred to) own the apostles themselves were grossly mistaken, as to those prophecies, if they may be so called, concerning the "second coming of Christ, and the end of the world." How does this appear? Why, "in almost every epistle, they speak of their time as the last time; of their age as the last age, and of these days as the last days." For proof of this we are referred to several texts, among others. The places he points out, but gives us not the expressions. He wrote, it is to be supposed, for such as would take his honest word for what he said, without troubling themselves to consult the writers. How many of them speak to this point, a common reader without his comment, will not see. As that, "knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we first believed. Does not this plainly shew, the apostle thought his age the last age, and the day of judgment approaching? Not to every reader, surely, whatever sense he puts on salvation? Whether it be temporal or eternal. "Looking for and hastening to, (or, on, or, as, or, as) the coming of the day of God. These words, whatever be meant by the day of God, explain one another. Looking for this day with such earnestness and diligence, to get ready for it, as would in a sort bring it forward, which is the christian's duty in every age. Especially since the day of death, which every man must expect, puts an end to his season of trial, which is therefore of equal importance as if he were then to be judged.

SOME of them do indeed imply theirs to be the last times and days; and so they were the last dispensation. This was the dialect of their country. The distinction of time among the Jews, into *Inane*,

Lex,
 Rom. xiii. xli. 2 Pet. iii. 12. &c. &c. &c.

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Lex, & Tempora Messiae being common and well known. And since the *Tempora Messiae* was now come, this was the last dispensation, and these the last days. And the apostle to the Hebrews, begins his epistle with this distinction, * God who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake, in past time, to our fathers, by the prophets, hath, in these last days, spoken to us, by his son. In this sense the apostle tells the Corinthians † that, on them the ends of the world (or completion of ages *τὸ τέλος αἰώνων*) were come. And the Hebrews, that † Christ, in the end, or consummation of the ages, *αὐτοτελείᾳ τῶν αἰώνων*, the closing dispensation, came to put away sin, by the sacrifice of himself. The *ἔσχατος αἰὼν* in St. John, seems to mean the same, unless we understand him of the period of the Jewish state; Christ having foretold that † false Christs should arise a little before the dissolution of the Jewish state. St. John † says, even now there are many antichrists whereby we know it is the last time. Either the dissolution of the Jewish state, its last period is at hand, or the settlement of the last dispensation, which is then to commence. But it does not imply that John thought the end of the world was at hand.

THE *μεσσία τοῦ νεκροῦ*, coming of the LORD, which in St. James is said to be drawing near, is manifestly meant (as is plain from the connection) of the destruction of the Jews, against whose wickedness he had inveighed from the beginning of the chapter. A proper consideration for Jewish christians, persecuted by them, to exercise patience. The day which the † Hebrews saw approaching, must have the same meaning, as is plain from the connection. He is pressing them to faithfulness in their christian pro-

* Heb. ii. 1.

† 1 Cor. x. 11.

* Heb. ix. 26.

† Matt. xxiv. 34.

* 1 John ii. 18.

* Jam. v. 7 & 8.

* Heb. x. 25.

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profession, to assemble often and exhort one another, and the more for that the day was approaching; for if they revolted from christianity, no more sacrifice for sin was to be expected, as the approaching day would evince, by the desolation of the temple, and abrogation of the whole Levitical service. *Onier & ihus.*

* The Lord is near, or at hand; may very fairly be understood, of being near in place as we say, as well as time. The Lord is ever near, and if it be connected with what follows, the sense will be very natural: * Be careful for nothing, but in all things by prayer and supplication, make known your requests to God. As in the old testament God is said to be * nigh to them who are of a broken heart, and to save them of a contrite spirit. And as David says, * I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Or as it is more appositely still express'd, * The Lord is nigh to them that call upon him, that call upon him in truth. There is no need to understand this, therefore, of any coming of Christ at all: but of his continual presence with his people according to his promise.

WHEN * Peter presses to sobriety, watchfulness, and prayer, by this consideration, *marion d. n. n. & n. n. n.* The end of all things is at hand; would speak to his purpose, if the *maria* all things, must be understood of the universe, or whole world. But this author knows, that general expressions of scripture, must frequently be understood with limitations. And considering the apostle is writing to Jewish converts, and these much harass'd by their persecuting countrymen, all things seem more properly to be understood of the whole frame of the Jewish polity, civil and ecclesiastical. The end of this was at hand, when they would in a great measure be delivered out of their hands, though they might also, in many re-

* Phil. iv. 5.

† ver. 6.

* Psa. xxxiv. 18.

* Psa. xvi. 8.

b Psa. cxlv. 18.

* 1 Pet. iv. 7.

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specta, be sufferers with them. How proper a consideration was this, either way, to excite them to sobriety, watchfulness, and prayer? It does not from hence appear that Peter thought, or meant it, of the approach of the day of judgment.

As to the charge to Timothy, to keep the commandment of God unrebukeably till the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, I take it to be equivalent, to that other charge, to be sincere and without offence, as in or at the day of Christ; for that, to be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. And I am mistaken, if *axen* (a term of the same import with *ixen*) be not to be thus taken in that place; Being confident that he who hath begun a good work in you, will finish it, inflexibly, in or at the day of Christ.

SHewing forth Christ's death till he come, *axen* may, and should be understood, of his coming to judge the world; but carries no intimation that it was near. I see no reason, why this obligation should not lie on christians, till the judgment day.

BUT Paul himself speaks as if he expected to live till the day of judgment. How so? Because he says, This we say unto you, that we who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them who are asleep.—The dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain, shall be caught up with them into the clouds, to meet the Lord, and so shall we ever be with the Lord. This sense the author endeavours to confirm, by two other passages: Behold I shew you a mystery, we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. And that, we who are in this tabernacle do groan earnestly,

^a 1 Tim. vi. 13, 14.

^c Phil. i. 10.

^e 1 Cor. i. 8.

^b Phil. i. 6. ^d 1 Cor. xi. 26. ^f 1 Thess. iv. 13-19.

^k 1 Cor. xv. 51. ^g 2 Cor. v. 4.

ly, not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. All the foundation for this sense, is, that Paul must include himself in the term *we*. For which, certainly, there is no necessity. Nay, upon this supposition he must at once expect to die and be raised, and not to die but remain till Christ's coming to judgment. For just before one of his citations, he says, ^m knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus, shall raise up us also by Jesus, and present us together with you. And that he indeed expected to die himself, is plain from more passages than one: He tells the *Philippians* ⁿ, it was his earnest expectation and hope, that in nothing he should be ashamed; but that Christ should be magnified in his body, whether it were by life or death; adding, to me to live is Christ and to die is gain. And that ^o he counted all things but dung that he might win Christ, and might know him and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable to his death. And to *Timothy*, he says, ^p that he was now ready to be offered, and that the time of his departure was at hand. And even just after his expression of being unclothed and clothed upon, whatever that means, he says ^q, we are willing rather to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord. Which plainly implies, that the body was to be put off, before they passed into his presence, or, that they must die and depart from it. And considering that christians, whether on earth or in heaven, whether of this nation or that, whether they live in the present or any future age, are spoken of as one family, one city, one body, &c. it is no way strange nor improper, for the apostle to speak of what, in some respect or other, concerns them as such, in this manner. And to put this matter as to Paul out of

^m 2 Cor. iv. 14. ⁿ Phil. i. 20, 21. ^o Ch. iii. 8, 18. ^p 2 Tim. iv. 6, 7. ^q 2 Cor. v. 8.

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of doubt, and prove that he had no expectation of the day of judgment during his life, his *second epistle* seems written for this purpose among others, that some who had mistaken this passage in his *first epistle*, or had this sense suggested to them, in some counterfeited letter in his name, might be set right. *Be not shaken in mind, neither by word, nor by spirit, nor by letter, as from us, as if the day of Christ were at hand, adding, let no man deceive you (viz. in this) by any means.* And then goes on to shew, that antecedently to it, there must be *a great apostacy, and the man of sin must be revealed*; which it is plain, according to his account, must be the work of more than one age. And though he says, *the mystery of iniquity began to work, as John says there were many antichrists already*; yet what he says introductory to the account, and the account it-self, makes it out that he did not think the judgment-day was near, or that he was likely to live to it. The same may be said of *John*, the writer of the *Revelation*, which, whatever be its meaning, certainly stretches into a greater length of time, than that apostle's age. And that *Peter* expected to die before the judgment-day, is plain from what he says in the beginning of his *second epistle*. Ch. i. ver. 13, 14, 15.

BUT, our Saviour himself, it seems, had assured his disciples, in his prophecy (if it may be so called) that the end of the world and day of judgment were to be so soon, and therefore it is no wonder the apostles should have such a conceit. *For though he does indeed tell them, that of the day and hour no man nor angel knows, this is only said to put the disciples on the watch, lest they should be surprized like the old world, when the flood came and swept them away. Watch therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord will come.*

And

^a 2 Thess. ii. 2, 3. ^f ver. 3. ^g ver. 7.

^b Page 235. ^c Mat. xxiv. 36, 37, 38, 39.

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“ And the apostles agreeably to this admonition of
 “ the Lord say, ^a *Yourself know that the Lord*
 “ *cometh as a thief in the night.* But this is not said
 “ in contradiction to that saying, ^b *That this gene-*
 “ *ration shall not pass away, till all these things*
 “ *are fulfilled;* adding for confirmation, *heaven and*
 “ *earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass a-*
 “ *way.* And all in answer to the apostles question,
 “ ^c *where shall these things be, and what shall be the sign*
 “ *of thy coming, and the end of the world?*” — He
 goes on, “ And even after the resurrection when Peter
 “ asks concerning the beloved disciple, our Saviour
 “ says, ^d *If I will that he tarry till I come, what is*
 “ *that to thee?* And the last thing his disciples ask
 “ him on his ascension, is, *Will thou at this time re-*
 “ *store again the kingdom to Israel?* And the answer
 “ is very consistent with the kingdom, even the tem-
 “ *poral kingdom's* being restored during *their* lives.
 “ And by our Saviour's saying, when the last supper
 “ was ended, ^e *I will not drink henceforth of the fruit*
 “ *of the vine, till I drink it new with you, in my*
 “ *father's kingdom,* no doubt they believed this hap-
 “ *py time was not far off.*”

WHY these last three passages are cited, no one
 can guess, unless it be to ridicule scripture-language,
 however impertinently. For the reply to the dis-
 ciples enquiry, is manifestly *swaving* the question.
 “ *It is not for you to know the times and seasons.* And
 if it be consistent with even temporal kingdoms being
 restored during *their* time, it implies no such thing,
 and much less that the day of judgment would be in
their times, which it was brought, one would think,
 to prove. The apostles misapprehension, it is to
 be hoped, is no proof that our Saviour assured them,
 that

^a 1 Thess. v. 2. ^b 2 Pet. iii. 10. ^c Mat. xxiv. 34. 35.
^d ver. 3. ^e John xxi. 22. ^f Acts i. 6, 7. ^g Mat. xxvi. 29.
^h Acts i. 7.

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that the end of the world, would be in *their* times, especially of a saying that had nothing to do with it. And supposing that they, through a prejudice common to their nation, mistook our Saviour's meaning, at the close of his supper, and believed that his *temporal* kingdom was shortly to be set up, must therefore his words imply that in *their* time the judgment-day was to come? Which was what he *should* have proved here, or he speaks besides his purpose. And supposing his saying concerning *John* implies his remaining alive till his coming, must this mean that he should live till the day of judgment? Does his coming no where in scripture signify his coming to destroy the Jews, and dissolve their state, and set up his own *spiritual* kingdom? If it does, this may be the meaning here. Beyond this period *John* lived. But there is no hint that he should live till the day of judgment, in it.

BUT how does it appear that our Saviour, in answering the enquiry of the *disciples*, does at all speak of the day of judgment? It can only be made out from the tenor of *their* question, or some expressions in the answer, that if it relate to the destruction of the *Jewish* state, must be figurative, and too strong for the purpose. As to the first, That the apostles had at that time the notion of a judgment-day, that should put a period to the world, does not appear. And though they had no notion, perhaps, of the abrogation of the *Jewish* law, they had, with all their people, the notion of a new dispensation, under the reign of the *Messias*; and therefore, that upon the setting up his kingdom, their present dispensation must cease. And when our Saviour so plainly told them, of the destruction of *their* temple, this must intimate that the *then* dispensation must there with be at an end; though they might at the same time expect the erection of a new one. They plainly

ly expected this would be done on his taking the throne, and this seems to be the whole of their question, *When will these things be, and what will be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?* *Consummatio seculi*, the completion and close of the present dispensation. It is plain, they expected that the destruction of the temple, the coming of Christ, and the end of the age would be *contemporary*. They do not make two questions of it, *when* will the temple be destroyed, and *when* will thy coming be, and the world be ended? But *when* will the temple be destroyed, and *what* will the signs be, of thy coming and the completion of the age? Or, in other words, *when* will the temple be demolished, thy kingdom be set up, and this dispensation close? And what will be the signs? What hints will there be before-hand of those events? This is, manifestly, all that is included in *their* question. And it plainly speaks their expectation, that all would fall out together. And whether they had an expectation of a judgment-day or no, yet since they expected the kingdom of the Messiah, would be a temporal one, this makes it evident, that they could have no view to a day of judgment, and the final period of all things, nor include it in their question.

AND our Saviour, in his answer, seems entirely to confine himself to their question thus stated. Such are the signs he gives out, as the Jews doing on false Christs, hearkening to false prophets, persecuting the preachers and professors of the Gospel, growing seditious and tumultuous, the spreading of the gospel, rumours of wars, especially the *abomination making desolate standing in the holy place*, which Luke explains by, *Jerusalem's being encompassed by armies, viz. those of the Romans*. Then

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Matt. xxiv. 5. Ver. 11. Ver. 9. Ver. 7, 10.
Ver. 14. Ver. 6. Ver. 15. Lukexxi. 20.

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he says it will be time to look to themselves, ⁹ *For* there shall be great tribulation, such as was not from the beginning of the world, nor ever shall be, ¹⁰ *when* the Jews should fall by the edge of the sword, and be led captive into all nations, and Jerusalem should be trodden under foot of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles should be fulfilled, all literally and woefully verified in the event. And these signs having been specified, all which point at the ruin of Jerusalem; it is said, ¹¹ *that* immediately after these days, shall the sun be darkened and the moon shall not give her light, &c. And then shall appear the sign of the son of man in heaven, and then shall all the tribes of the earth, (or land ¹² *in* ¹³ *the*) mourn: and they shall see the son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. And he shall send out his angels (or messengers) with a great sound of a trumpet, (or, a trumpet of great sound or voice), and shall gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. And soon after follows, *Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass away, till all these things be fulfilled, till all be done.* This is all he had been saying. For I see no reason for excepting any thing, he had said, out of it. Must this imply, that immediately after these signs, Jerusalem must be destroyed, and the judgment-day come, and the end of all things? Why? The expressions are too figurative, or the figures too strong, to represent the destruction only of the Jewish polity, civil and ecclesiastical. Not to this author, one would think, who elsewhere makes it an objection to scripture-language, that the destruction of Jerusalem is described in the new testament, as if nature was unhinged, and the universe dissolving. And refers us to another like hyperbolical description of the destruction of Babylon in the prophecy of Isaiah, as a like instance of the

unfit

⁹ Matt. xxiv. 21.

¹⁰ Luke xxi. 24.

¹¹ Matt. xxiv. 29, 30, 31.

¹² Luke xxi. 32.

¹³ Page 302.

unfit language of scripture: where it is said, *The stars of heaven shall not give their light. The sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not give her light.* Suppose this now to be meant of the nobles and rulers of Babylon, why may not the sun, moon and stars, &c. in the prophecy of our Saviour, be understood of the glory and excellency of the Jewish constitution entirely failing, all their light being put out? Is there any thing unnatural or unintelligible in such a figure?

If it be said, that *the sign of the son of man shall appear in heaven, say that the son of man shall be seen coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.* St. Luke seems to explain it by saying, *there shall be signs in the sun, and the moon, and the stars,* betokening the vengeance the son of man was taking on the Jews. And (not to take notice of the unusual appearances, reported by the Jewish historians, preceding this catastrophe, because I would not lay too much stress on prodigies) if they were any way made sensible, this destruction came upon them for crucifying the Messiah, this must carry conviction of his great power and glory. And this sense is plain, though pompously exprest, and in strong figures, after the eastern manner.

And when it is added, *then shall he send forth his angels, to gather together his elect from the four winds from one end of heaven to the other;* yet when the proper sense of *angel* is no more than *Nuncio*, a messenger, this fairly implies no more than his sending out his ministers into all the world, to publish the gospel. And though it be added, *they shall go with a trumpet of great sound;* it is but a proper figure to signify the efficacy of their preaching: It would be with a sound that would procure attention. In which sense the apostle says, *Their*

E e 3

sound

* Isa. xlii. 10.

* Luke xxi. 25.

* Röm. x. 18.

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as found went out into all the earth, and their words to
 the ends of the world, *the Roman Empire*, which was nom-
 inally termed *the world*, as the land of *Judea* its
 self is sometimes by their writers in *Greek*.
 There is nothing here, therefore, that necessa-
 rily requires the understanding our Saviour, of the
 day of judgment. Nor has this author any ground
 to suppose, that by what he here said, his apostles
 were led into a mistake, that the end of the world
 must be in their times, or that they took him in
 this sense. Nay, if they understood him, as an-
 swering their question only, they could not take
 him in this sense. It is answer in this sense, is not an
 answer to their enquiry. Nor are there any signs
 given of his coming to judge the world. Since all,
 here mentioned, manifestly point at the destruction
 of the Jews, and the settlement of his kingdom,
 consequent to it. So that there is no foundation for his inference,
 that if most of the apostles (he cites four out of
 the twelve) were mistaken, upon whatever motive,
 in a point of such consequence, how can we be
 certain, that any of them may not be mistaken,
 in any other? It is a conclusion drawn without
 having proved his premises. It does not appear that
 the apostles he cites, did expect the day of judg-
 ment would be in their times, much less that most
 of the apostles did. Nor that they were led into
 this mistaken expectation, by their master's prophecy.
 So that there is no room for inferring, they may be
 mistaken in any other point, or that they were un-
 inspired in what they deliver as the mind of God.
 But when he adds, "If they were not inspired in
 what they say, in their writings, of the com-
 ing of Christ, how could they be inspired in
 those arguments, they build on a foundation far
 from

from being so? He seems to have been in haste, and till he is at leisure to explain himself, I must pass it as unintelligible. And to avoid from
 BEFORE I proceed to consider, what he objects to the precepts of Christ himself, I must not wholly overlook some exceptions he makes, not reducible to any of the heads mentioned. And to suppose, that the style of scripture, he^a says, is not ~~read~~, more being express'd than is meant, or in other words, it is in many places hyperbolic. Admit it. Is it therefore unintelligible? Or would he have had Jews and ~~Easter~~ have written in the style of *Romans*, and even the ~~correctest~~ writers amongst them? And had they, are there no hyperbolic expressions even in Tully himself? But he is pleased to give some specimens. Two have been just mentioned, the prophet *Isaiah's* description of the destruction of *Babylon*, and our Saviour's of *Jerusalem*. And *David*, he^a says, talks as if heaven and earth were moved on his behalf, and the course of nature quite overthrown. And what then? Is Why, it is the expressions of the eastern people are full of pomp, amplification and hyperbole. Who can help it? But does this make the language unintelligible? Had these people no meaning? Was all their language *parade*? And are not such pompous expressions fitly used, when the appearances of the most grand and magnificent Being are the subject of the description? Does not the pompous figure and allusion, naturally greatness men's conceptions of God? Other passages he instances in, are, that it is said, *all the kings of the earth sought the presence of Solomon*. And *that if all things which Jesus did, were written, the world itself would not contain the books*. But is any ever likely to be led into a mistake, by such expressions? Is not the amplification obvious on view? And is there any language without

E c 4

^a Page 212. ^a Page 302. ^b Psa. xviii. ^c Page 302.

^d 2 Chron. ix. 23. ^e John xxi. 25.

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without such forms of speaking? Should I say, *all the world knows Dr. T.—I is the author of Christianity as old, &c.* Or that there is a carload of false reasonings, misquotations, &c. in it, would any one think the meaning is what the letter expresses? And what if he could bring an hundred like instances, is it any wonder that a revelation penned by *Jerus.* should have some peculiarities of their *style* in it? Or does this prove the scriptures are not a plain directory in necessary things?

AND suppose some texts, he cites, from the new testament, are thus hyperbolical; as, *Whatsoever ye ask in my name, that will I do. If two of you agree on earth concerning any thing they shall ask, it shall be done for them by my father which is in heaven. If you have faith as a grain of mustard-seed, you shall remove mountains, and nothing shall be impossible to you. Things present and things to come all are yours, &c.* In all these passages the general meaning is plain, and was never misunderstood, *viz.* That Christ would be very ready to hear the prayers of his disciples, especially their *consentient, united* prayers, That his apostles, by faith, should work very great and signal miracles, as if nothing were impossible to them. That all things that befall good men in this world, should turn to their good, and hereafter they should enjoy perpetual happiness.

AND that passage, *Who so forsakes houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father or mother, or wife or children, or lands for my sake, shall in this life receive an hundred fold, and in the world to come, life everlasting,* can mislead none who use common sense and care. For who that considers, what Christ tells his disciples in other places, can understand him bere of an hundred fold, of those outward enjoyments they had forsaken? Could they rea-

sonably

^f Matt. xix. 29.

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reasonably expect this, who were to look for the ^{ba-}ried of ^{ad-}min, and to be persecuted and hunted from one city to another? No. But, they were to have abundant compensation, in the testimony of their consciences, their christian privileges and heavenly hopes, and divine consolations. By these they would be enabled, to count themselves blessed when persecuted; and reckon the sufferings of the present life, but light and transient, whilst they were working out of them, a far more exceeding, and an eternal weight of glory.

When christians are said to be ^{made kings} and priests unto God, and to reign on earth, who puts a literal meaning on these phrases, or understands them of any thing but the great dignity put on them, and the near relation into which they are taken to God, even on earth: Or as Peter expresses it, that they are a spiritual house, in which God would dwell or be specially present, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ?

When our Saviour talks of ^{eating the flesh} and drinking the blood of the son of man, the expression is manifestly figurative, and sufficiently explained in the rest of the discourse. None, without the grossest abuse of words, can take it in the literal sense, whatever monstrous practices it may have produced in past times, or whatever senseless disputes it may have since occasioned. For in the literal sense, how few could have been saved, by eating his flesh and drinking his blood, without taking some monstrous absurdities of popery to it? But the meaning of the expression is not only intelligible, but plain, taking it in connection with the rest of the discourse.

⁸ Ch. x. 22, 23.
¹ 2 Cor. iv. 18, 17.
¹ 1 Pet. ii. 5.

⁴ Ch. v. 12.
¹ Rev. i. 10.
¹ John vi. 53.

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He pretends, that many commands given of God to the prophets, if literally understood, would make them look like mad-men or idiots, instancing in Isaiah's being required to walk naked for a sign; Jeremiah's being required to make bands and yokes, and put them on his neck, and send them to several kings; Ezekiel's being commanded, to draw Jerusalem on a wheele, lay siege to it, build a fort against it, set a camp against it, and set battering-rams against it round about, &c. As to which I have this to say, that if the literal meaning does indeed imply madness or idiotism, then it may not be the proper meaning, but that this was either parable, or done in vision, and only reported to the people. But every thing that appears to him, or the people of his country, as instances of madness or idiotism, is no argument of it. Habits and customs of countries are very different. And perhaps one of his polite Chinese, were he to appear in his country dress, and practise some of the customs in his country amongst us, would appear to English people at first, as a very odd and uncouth creature, and one not well in his wits. And this may be all in the present case, to give countenance to such an appearance. These prophets prophesied among Jews. As an allegorical and figurative way of speaking, suited their genius and taste, so such signs and types might strike and impress them, more than the bare report of what God had revealed to the prophet. And what impropriety, in God's adapting these discoveries to that people's taste, for whom they were chiefly, if not solely designed?

But things are absolutely condemned in scripture which are only conditionally, as the Jewish rites and sacrifices are represented as iniquity and an abomination to the Lord. It is true,

^a Isa. xx. 3, 11.

^o Jerem. xxvii. 2, 3.

^p Ezek. iv. 1, 2, 3, 4.

^q Page 304.

true. In case it is said to be an abomination, and the calling
solemn assemblies an iniquity. But in what connection?
Of this the author says nothing. But takes a scrap
of a sentence, as if it were independent and entire.
At which rate one may make nonsense, absurdity
and imperty of the most sober, exact and religious
writer. The whole passage had made the meaning
plain to any intelligent reader: To what purpose
is the multitude of your sacrifices to me, saith the
LORD? I am full of the burnt-offerings of rams,
and the fat of fed beasts. Bring no more vain obla-
tions: Incense is an abomination to me, the new moons
and sabbaths, the calling of solemn assemblies, I set
not away with. It is iniquity, even the solemn meeting.
Your new moons and appointed sabbaths my soul hateth.
Your hands are full of blood, wash ye, make ye clean.
Is not the reason here plainly given, why incense
was an abomination. See, even the evil of their doing.
Are the Jewish rites and sacrifices absolutely conden-
ned? No sure, but only in the circumstances men-
tioned, because the offerers were wicked, and their
hands full of blood. The condition, quality and
misbehaviour of the people, rendered their religious
meetings and services hateful. None can any man
of common sense mistake the meaning, as thus con-
nected. This is not finding faults in scripture, but
making them, and that in no fair nor honest way
neither. But, *Things commanded*, says the, are positively
said not to be commanded. As, If I speak not to
your fathers, nor commanded them, in that day I
brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning
burnt-offerings and sacrifices. This also is a quotation
by halves. Had the whole passage been fairly quo-
ted, the meaning had been obvious enough. But this
thing commanded I them, saying, obey my voice and
I will be your God, and you shall be my people, and
walk

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walk ye in all my ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you. Those who have read the divine commands in the law of Moses, concerning sacrifices and burnt-offerings, cannot think that the prophet here means, that what is so plainly enjoined, was not enjoined. They must therefore understand it in a comparative sense only, however positively exprest. And though it is exprest not *this* but *that*, must understand it not so much *this* as *that*; not thus whilst you neglect that, which is of more importance. This way of speaking is usual in scripture, nor is the meaning dark or difficult, to any advertent reader. Thus in the old testament, God says, * I desired mercy and not sacrifice, and (which explains the other) the knowledge of God, more than burnt-offering. As in Samuel it is said, * to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. So in the new testament, † Labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for that which endureth to eternal life. So, ‡ We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. That is, not chiefly, nor with so much earnestness and concern, So God did not require sacrifices and burnt-offerings, so much as obedience.

In the same sense is that saying to be taken, and is understood by every attentive reader: § If any man come after me, and hate not father and mother, and wife and children, &c. yea and his own life, he cannot be my disciple. No one that understands the religion of Jesus, and how much love and goodwill it breaths to all men, even strangers and enemies, can think, that proper hatred to father, mother, &c. or one's own life, is made a necessary condition of being his disciple; but must understand it only of an inferior love, such as that he may part with all, and even life it's self, for Christ's sake. And thus

* Hof. vi. 6.

† 1 Sam. xv. 22.

‡ John vi. 27.

§ 2 Cor. iv. ult.

¶ Luke xiv. 26.

thus in another evangelist is this very saying express'd, *He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me.* The lesser love is a comparative hatred. And now I proceed,

Fifthly. To the exceptions he has to the sayings and precepts of Christ himself. These are all to express'd as to mislead men, at least not so plainly as to inform them in truth or duty. And,

First. As to the sayings of Christ. The new testament, he tells us, is full of parables. The Gospels, indeed, report many of our Saviour's parables. It was a way of instruction usual among the Jews. And, as has been observed, it is no wonder, our Saviour should accommodate himself to their taste. And though this allegorical way was more common among them, instruction or the conveyance of moral sentiments by *fable* (which is of the same kind) has been in use both among Greeks and Romans, down from the time of *Esope* the *Phrygian*, and has been esteemed a more advantageous way of moral instruction, than dry precept or abstract reasoning, more accommodate to the common taste, and more apt to insinuate into the minds of men. And why should this parabolical way of instruction in our Saviour, more than that by *fable*, raise such an outcry against him? If it were a proper way of instruction in Greek and Roman Mythologists, why should it be such an impropriety in him, among a people so much used to it? If he can relish *Aristotle's Ethics*, *Grægius*, &c. the generality of mankind may have another taste, which our Saviour was more concerned to consult, especially as his ministry was among the Jews.

And as most of his parables relate to them, so they either have a meaning so plain in themselves,

or were so explained by him, or made so plain by the event, that few can mistake it, unless they indulge their fancy beyond what is fit, and without resting in the general view of the parable, endeavour to affix a meaning of their own, to every particular part. This many weak people have done, and made very cold work of it. But this is not to the discredit of the parable, any more than a like silly perversion of the meaning of any other author.

But our author has a very notable insinuation concerning our Saviour's use of parables, that must not be overlooked. *Without a parable,* says he, "Jesus spake not to the multitude, and for this remarkable reason, *that seeing they might see, and not perceive, and hearing they might hear, and not understand, lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins forgiven them.*" By which he would insinuate, that our Saviour wrapped up his doctrine in parables, with this view, that the people might not get any good by them. A suggestion utterly unbecoming the character of our Saviour, who was so full of benevolence, and went about doing good; and what has no manner of countenance from the text, if Matthew's more large account of the matter be but allowed to explain the briefer and more contracted ones in Mark. For there Christ tells his disciples, "To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For to whomsoever shall be given, shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but who soever shall not, (makes no such use) from him shall be taken away even that he has: (that is, through neglect it is likely to be lost.) Therefore I speak unto them in parables, because they seeing, see not."

not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they under-
stand. And in them is fulfilled, (that is, to them is applicable) the prophecy of Esaias, which saith by hearing ye shall (or, will) hear, and shall (or, will) not understand, and seeing ye shall (or, will) see, and shall (or, will) not perceive. For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed, lest at any time they should (or, might) see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and should (or, might) be converted, and I should heal them. In the close of this prophecy the blindness, dullness, and grossness of heart, are either intimated, or expressly said to be from themselves. For which reason the future, I think, should have throughout been rendered by will, not shall. And what is then the plain import of the passage? But that the views and prejudices of the Jews, would naturally blind their minds, and bar the light of truth, if set before them plainly, and perhaps do them mischief. But the disciples were so far rid of these prejudices, as to be teachable; they had ears open to divine instruction, minds that took in the light gladly, and were disposed to take in more. A good reason why to them, parables should be explained, as the former was, why, to the Jews, he should speak in parables.

TRUE it is that our Saviour, knowing the sensual taste of the Jews at that time, and their prejudice against the plain truth, did sometimes, with his meaning in parables, (and not open, to even to his own disciples, the mysteries of his kingdom fully. But why? Because they could not bear it. And others, it is very probable, had been provoked and enraged, upon his laying their wickedness open, or his plain contradiction of their fond, and in their accounts, sacred sentiments, and his plain prediction of what was coming on them. Those among the multitude who

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who were of more teachable dispositions, had such things been uttered in *plain words*, might have rejected them at once, when offering them under such a *disguise*, left room for cooler consideration, by which they might find their way into the mind. And in this case it was both *wise* and *kind* in our Saviour, to propose them under a veil; especially when this was a method of teaching, to which *that* people had been used. And upon the whole, who can think otherwise of his talk on this head, than that it is *cavil* instead of argument? and shews little disposition to find out *truth*, but a strong bias to find fault, right or wrong?

BUT, "What, saysⁱ he, can be more surprising, than Christ's declaring in most express terms, that he came to do things, which, we must suppose, he came to hinder. * Think not I am come to send peace: I come not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance with his father, &c. And again, ¹ Suppose ye, that I am come to give peace on earth, I tell you nay, but rather division. And again, ^m I am come to send fire on earth, and what will I, if it be already kindled?" It is true, that this seems not to us, to be so natural a way of expressing our Saviour's sense here. Yet no one, who looks with care into the scripture, can misapprehend his sense. No one, who knows that his character was to be meek and lowly, and that his religion was peaceable and good-natured, and strictly enjoins *innocence*, *meekness* and *patience*, even under the worst usage, and requires men to keep down resentment and passion, and ⁿ if it be possible as much as lies in them, to live peaceably with all men; can take our Saviour here to mean, that the very purpose of his coming into the world was to make divisions, set the nearest relations together by the ears, and set the world on fire,

³ Page 305. * Matt. x. 34. ¹ Luke xii. 51. ^m Ver. 49.

ⁿ Rom. xii. 18.

fire, and disturb the peace of mankind: But only that this was likely to be the event. It was what must be expected to follow, on the publication of his religion, from the vices, corruptions, passions, and prejudices of men, their hatred to it, and opposition and rage against it. And so, though the direct tendency and native purpose of his religion was to promote peace, benevolence and universal goodness, yet it would occasion discord, variance, breaches among dearest friends and relatives, not in its self, but through the corruptions of mankind. No understanding, how vulgar soever, can fairly put any other meaning on it.

BUT, says ^o he, "From that saying of our Saviour, *There be some eunuchs so born from their mother's womb; and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men; and there be some eunuchs, who have made themselves eunuchs, for the kingdom of heaven's sake; the primitive fathers, who thought, they ought not to put a different meaning on the word eunuch, in the latter end of the verse, from what it had twice before, believed it a piece of heroic virtue, for men to castrate themselves.*" Suppose this to be fact, and that these fathers misinterpreted the text; does it follow, that the meaning is neither plain nor intelligible? And if they argued as he represents, was it right arguing? And how many besides Origen can he find so interpreting it? No one, who adverts to the context and connexion can think so. The occasion of the saying, is our Saviour's declaring, against a man's putting away his wife, but for fornication's sake, and that whoso does this, and marries another woman, commits adultery, as does he who marries her thus put away. Now it was very usual among the Jews to put away a wife by

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by a bill of divorce, on very trivial occasions. The apostles therefore, who had long been accustomed to quite other doctrine and usage, cry that if this were the case, it were good not to marry, or in our language, it is best for men not to marry. To this our Saviour replies, all men cannot receive this saying, save them to whom it is given, that is, cannot abstain from marriage; or in the apostles language, cannot contain, or forbear, and yet live chaste. In which case, men ought to marry, whatever inconvenience result from confinement to one woman. And our Saviour immediately adds, there be some eunuchs, &c. he that is able to receive, let him receive, that is, the saying of the disciples, which he had before said all men could not receive. The meaning is, let him who has the gift, and can contain, forbear marriage if he pleases, and he does well to do it for the kingdom of heaven's sake, that he may better pursue the purposes, and perform the offices of the christian life and state. Eunuchism is plainly the same with a power of receiving this saying: and the Eunuch he who has this power. Which some have naturally, others through violence, and others voluntarily, that they may addict themselves with the greater freedom to the christian life or ministry. And the term is plainly figurative throughout, in the first clauses as well as the last. And this author is quite wrong, I should think, to say that in the first two clauses the word bears the same meaning. An eunuch made of men, is one deprived of his genitals by violence. Those born of their mothers, thus destitute, I dare say, are very rare, if there are any such. I am sure I never heard or read of one. It is very unlikely such should be mentioned to a common audience, and more unlikely they should understand it of such persons as were never known or heard of by them.

And

And it is more likely they should take the expression more accommodately to their *knowledge and experience*, of such as were naturally *inhabile* for generation, and *without* appetite for a female. And if this expression must be *figurative*, and the context and connection required the word to be thus understood throughout, what ground of complaint, though some persons have misunderstood it? But,

Secondly, He has exceptions to the manner *wherein* our Saviour's precepts are express'd. This is not done in language *plain and fit*. How so? "The end of God's giving *any precepts*, says he, is to make them *so plain*, that they cannot *well be mistaken*. This is agreeable to infinite *wisdom*, directed by infinite *goodness*, which *certainly* will give us *equal* degrees of evidence, for religious truths, that *so much* concern us, as for those of *less importance*." No doubt, God gave his precepts to mankind that they may be known and practised, and therefore has delivered them *plainly enough* for this purpose. And all the rules of the Gospel are thus intelligible; nor can their sense be *well mistaken*. But his reason to support his assertion is *presumption*, not *argument*. And if it had any truth in it, would prove God neither infinitely *good* nor *wise*. Are many of the very *laws* of *nature* demonstrable, with evidence *equal* to that of many mathematical verities, of *little use* or *importance*? Let his *own* demonstration of them be reviewed, by any unprejudiced person, and I am mistaken, or he will pronounce many *useless* propositions in *Euclid*, to carry in them more clear and convincing evidence. Is it not *presumption* in him then to say, that because God is infinitely good and wise, he *certainly* will give us *equal* evidence, &c? But he is very sure christian revelation must be false, and to make this good, he seems to have little

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concern, how much he abuses God *himself*; and reproaches his perfections. Surely the precepts of the Gospel are as easily to be understood, by any man using his *reason*, and comparing passages *obscure* with those more *plain* and *clear*, as can reasonably be desired, and by very few are mistaken. If by some they are, so certainly are the *laws of nature*, as clear and demonstrable as he represents them.

BUT what is it that renders the *precepts* of our Saviour so difficult to be understood, and the language on which they are delivered so unfit? His accusations against them are thus summed up: "They
" are for the most part delivered so *hyperbolically*,
" as would lead men astray, if they were governed
" by the *usual* meaning of words; or else express'd
" in so *loose, general* and *undetermined* a manner,
" that men are left to be *as much* governed by
" reason, as if there were no such precepts. And
" *occasional* precepts not being distinguished from
" those which are *not*, we have no way to distinguish them, but by the *nature of things*, which
" will point us out the rules which *eternally oblige*,
" whether delivered in *scripture* or not." So that *without* the light of nature and common sense, it seems, *scripture* is not to be understood, and all duties of eternal obligation may be known by the *light of nature* without *scripture*; so that this is perfectly *useless*. And yet not surely unless these rules of eternal obligation may be as *easily* known *without* *scripture* as *with* it. It may have its use in helping multitudes to a *better* understanding of these rules, at an *easier* rate than by rational deduction, though *his* all-sufficient understanding can do without it. *Aristotle, Tully, Grotius* and *Pufendorf*, are with ^u him better teachers than *Jesus Christ*. " In them the *nature* and *reason* of our
" duties,

* Page 318, 319.

^u Page 300.

"duties, their connexion and the dependence they have one on another, are plainly seen. Whereas in scripture, things are not so treated, as that men may precisely know the nature and extent of their duty." Suppose that these authors treat of those duties which they explain, more particularly, and in a different way from scripture, does this argue that they more fully teach us the law of nature, in all its branches, than the scriptures? Or must the scriptures have been written in this way, to prove them a divine revelation? I dare say Grotius and Puffendorff were of another mind. And I could venture to affirm Tully and Aristotle had been so, had they enjoy'd the benefit of christian revelation. Scripture-precepts contain a fuller scheme of natural duty, though not in connexion, and better fitted for common use, than more dependant and connected discourses. And may not the precepts be plain, tho' not thus laid out? And though they do not enter into as many particulars, nor point out the reasons on which they are founded, which I suppose is what he means by the nature and extent of our duty, may they not yet teach us our duty both fully and plainly?

BUT let us attend him to the particulars of this general charge. Indeed I do not meet with any Instances of precepts hyperbolically delivered. But first, he tells us, the precepts of Christ are generally so delivered as not to be understood in their literal and obvious meaning. "Who, without having recourse to reason, but would be apt to think the poor as such, the only favourites of heaven?" Why? Because it is said, *Blessed be ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.* *Blessed be ye that hunger, for you shall be filled.* But does this Author know any that require or direct persons to lay aside their reason in searching into the sense of scripture, or endeavour

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your to understand them *without* their understanding? And he cannot but know, that in the other *Evangelists* both of these passages are explained, *Blessed are the poor in spirit, the humble. Blessed are they which hunger and thirst after righteousness.* And this sense it is to be hoped is neither obscure nor difficult.

But, says he, "should we not think the gospel was an enemy to the rich, as such, and consequently to those methods which make a nation rich?" And why had he not added, therefore every trading nation should banish the gospel as an enemy to its trade and wealth? which one would think was the consequence he intended every one should draw. But why should we think of the gospel in this manner? Because it says, "Woe to you rich, for you have received your consolation." It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven. But who does not understand this with limitations? Either of such as "trust in riches, as our Saviour himself explains the last passage; or of such as lay up treasures for themselves, but are not rich towards God. Thus proverbial sayings, generally and indefinitely expressed, are understood in all authors. And, by the way,

The same is to be said of many other passages which he blames. As "blessed are they that mourn—Ye that weep—" Woe to them that laugh now. None is so senseless as to understand it of mere mourning, weeping, or laughing, whatever be the occasion; but of such as mourn for sin, or are in distress and persecution for righteousness sake, and such as live in a course of sensual and sinful mirth and pleasure. And "children and servants obey your parents

a Page 307. b Luke vi. 24. c Ch. xviii. 25. d Mark x. 34. e Luke xii. 21. f Mat. v. g Luke ii. 21. h Ver. 25. i Col. iii. 20, 22.

and masters in all things, not surely whether the things
commanded be good or evil. And ² Rejoice ever
more. ³ Pray without ceasing. Not that persons must
ever be rejoicing, what occasions soever for grief may
offer; not that they should be always at prayers,
and leave no time for eating, drinking, sleeping,
doing the proper business of life; but of being cheer-
ful, and by the power of christian principles and
hopes living above *frivling fears*, and of praying
daily, and maintaining, as much as may be, a con-
stant disposition for such an *exercise*, by living under
a sense of God, and in dependance on him. But to
return: know and how *shew his shew* of

"T is a *good* man, says ¹ he, might be rich.
"it was a *general* precept, ² Sell what you have,
"and give alms. Nay, the ³ woman that cast her
"two mites into the treasury, is commended, because
"she cast in all she had, even her whole living. And
"to shew that none was exempt from this precept,
"Jesus says to the man who had observed all the
"precepts from his youth, ⁴ one thing thou lackest;
"sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor. This
"precept, says he, is *impracticable* in a christian
"state, for where all are *sellers*, none can be *buyers*."
Then it is out of doubt, that in such a state this is not
a *general* nor *binding* precept. For if it binds not all,
it binds none at all. It could therefore only
be an *occasional* one. Though he would have it
binding on every one, because this *particular* person,
who vainly imagined he had been a *punctual* obser-
ver of the law, was bidden by Christ to *sell all he had*
and give to the poor, and come and be his disciple,
and look for his reward in heaven. Which was done
to shew him how defective his love to God, and faith
and trust in him, were. The circumstances plain-
ly shew, that this precept was *particular* and *occasio-*

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nal, nor does our Saviour appear to have given such command to any *other*, much less to have laid it as an obligation on *all* his disciples.

As to the *poor widow*, she is so far, indeed, commended by *our Saviour*, for putting all her living into the treasury, that he told his disciples she had done more, (*viz.* in proportion to her ability) than all who had put in. And he knew the principle on which she acted, and might hereupon commend her above the rest. But what is there in this, that implies like obligation on *all others*.

THE precept, *sell what you have and give alms*, is but indefinitely exprest. And himself must acknowledge, that in *some* circumstances the doing this may be a duty. As when the necessities of any we are bound to relieve, are urgent, and we have no other way to relieve them. Were a parent going to prison for a debt of fifty pounds, and a son having an estate, could not redeem him without selling, at least a part; would it not be his duty to sell what he had, and give *this* alms? But if we understand it of *selling all* and giving to the poor, it could be only an *occasional* precept given to the christians of *Judea*, for that particular juncture of time. And for this there might not only be a *reason* from the circumstances of the Christian church at that time, but even of the *Jewish* state. This was shortly to be dissolved, the *Romans* were coming to *take away their city and nation*, dispeople the country, and seize the possessions of the *Jews*. Was it not better these should be sold for the common subsistence of the *brethren*, than left to be the spoil of the common enemy of all the *Jews*?

THAT the precept binds not *universally*, is plain, from the distinction between *rich* and *poor* in the apostolical times, manifest in their writings. Had this been a general precept, binding on all christians in all times, how impertinent is St. Paul's discourse

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course to the *Corinthians*? How absurd his direction to *Timothy*, to charge them that were rich in this world not to be high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God — To do good, to be rich in good works — Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold of eternal life. Does this consist with binding all christians “not to be rich, but sell what they had and give to the poor?”

NAY, it looks very evident to me, that though many among the first christians were animated with such a spirit of generosity, as to sell their estates and distribute them among the brethren, yet this was not done from a belief that this was a general precept binding on all christians. Peter tells *Ananias* concerning his estate, which he pretended to have sold, and laid the whole purchase-money at the apostle's feet, “*Whilst it remained, was it not thine? And when it was sold, was it not in thine own power?*” Which implies that he was not bound to sell his estate, nor when it was, to devote the whole sum he had received. His sin was, that when he pretended to devote the whole, he kept back a part. But says this author again,

“EVEN the precept of forgiving injuries not only
“seven, but seventy times seven, except interpreted
“consistently with what the light of nature dictates
“to be our duty, in preserving our reputation, liberty and property, and in doing all we can in our
“several stations, to hinder all injury and injustice
“from others as well as our selves, would be a doctrine attended with fatal consequences. So that
“the expediency or even lawfulness of forgiving injuries, depends on such circumstances as human
“discretion is to judge of. So that it is the reason
“of things must determine us how to act. And
“when this precept is thus stated, there is nothing
“new

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“ new in it: Common prudence requiring, in case
“ of a *slight* injury, I should forbear a legal prose-
“ cution, since he may thus be made my friend.
“ But if he takes *advantage* of my forbearance, or
“ injures me the more, or the more frequently,
“ though I must not punish for *punishment's* sake,
“ I may seek my *legal* remedy. Good govern-
“ ments, for the sake of the *publick* good, require that
“ robbers, thieves, cheats, &c. should be prose-
“ cuted.”

BUT what is all this to the purpose? His argu-
ment is quite besides the matter. It proceeds upon
a *mistake* of the precept. It seems to me, that it
was originally intended for members of the same sa-
cred society or brotherhood. And even in the case of
injury from *such*, all fit methods of correcting the
offender, are not allowed only, but recommended.
“ If thy brother trespass against thee, go and tell him
of his fault between him and thee alone. If he hear
thee, thou hast gained thy brother. If he will not hear
thee, then take with thee one or two more, — If he
shall neglect to hear them, tell it the church, (or the
whole society.) But if he shall neglect to hear the
church, let him be to thee as an *heathen* man or publi-
can. — It follows, Then, that is, on occasion of what
he had said, comes Peter to him and says, Lord,
how often shall my brother sin against me, and I for-
give him? (with plain reference to the case first put.)
Till seven times? Jesus saith to him, not to seven
times only, but to *seventy times seven*. That is, in
case the brother, on being told of his injury, and
expostulated with upon it, hear him, or own his
fault and declare himself penitent, he is to be for-
given till *seventy times seven*. A definite number
for an indefinite: that is, without limitation.
Whenever he shows himself truly sorry for his fault
or trespass, he is to be forgiven. And thus it is
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^a Mat. xix. 15, 16, 17.

elsewhere explained. *If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.* But in case of obstinacy in the offence against *brotherly reproof*, especially of the *sacred society*, of which both are members, he is no longer to be owned as a *brother*, but accounted as an *heathen*, or *publican*. Does this precept, as thus connected, imply any thing inconsistent with *reason* or a regard to any necessary *rights* of mankind? Men may, for any thing implied in this precept, "shew a *due* regard, "to their *reputation*, *liberty* and *property*, may use "their endeavours to hinder *injury* and *injustice* "from themselves or others. It *trespasses* on no "rules of *prudence*, no laws relating to the *good* of "any community, nor can be attended with any *fatal* consequences."

NOR when it is elsewhere delivered, doth it imply any such thing. We are required *to forgive men their trespasses, if we would have God forgive our*. This implies, indeed, that we should not give ourselves up to *passion*, *resentment* or *revenge*, nor to seek the hurt of those who have injured us, but maintain a *benevolent* disposition towards them, and a *proneness* to do them good, rather than harm, to gratify our own *resentment* and *revenge*; and a *readiness* to forgive their injuries, when we see they *truly repent*, as we would hope to be forgiven of God on our *repentance*.

SUCH dispositions may consist with seeking legal redress of heinous wrongs, and the punishing *cheats*, *thieves* and *robbers*, for the good of the publick. Christianity breaks in upon no *rights* of society, nor requires such regard to *private* persons, as is inconsistent with publick safety; but it leaves them as it found them. But it requires us to keep down *resentment*, and as much as possible suppress *private* revenge, whilst we prosecute *publick* offenders; and

† Luke xvii. 3.

† Mat. vi. 14, 15.

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inclinations to *injure* and *hurt* where we seek reparation for *beinous wrongs*, and to cherish a disposition to *forgive* and be *reconciled* to the injurious, on their shewing a sincere *grief* and *repentance* for having done the wrong, and a *readiness* to make us all the reparation in their power; and to *pray* for them, when we suffer from them; and all this without neglecting any duty we owe the *publick*, or any reasonable regard to *our own* valuable rights.

“BUT if the precept admits such limitations, it “has nothing *new* in it; * *Celsus* telling us, this doctrine is not *peculiar* to christians: only they teach “it in a *grosser* sense. And *Confucius*, the *Cbinese* “philosopher, thus expresses it, Acknowledge benefits by the return of benefits, but *never* revenge “injuries.” As to what *Celsus* tells us, we are to take his word for it, for he gives no evidence. But if the doctrine of *Christ* on this head was not *new*, it is certainly enforced by new *motives* and *considerations*. And though the *Cbinese* philosopher, is “complimented by him (in *great respect* to christianity, no doubt) as laying down maxims of morality clear and plain, so as to explain the *obscurer* ones delivered by *Jesus Christ*; it is left to every reader to judge, whether the maxim of *Christ*, of forgiving injuries, be not full as *plain*, as *particular*, as *determinate*, at least, as this of *Confucius*, “never to “revenge injuries.” And whether this expresses all meant by *our Saviour* in forgiving injuries, is left to the unprejudiced world. But no doubt had the maxim of *Confucius* been in the *gospel*, and that of *our Saviour* in *Confucius*, this impartial judge and profound reasoner would have made the *latter* the more plain, and the *other* the more obscure, for just the same reason, *viz.* his *spite* against christianity.

BUT

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BUT when he comes to the precept of *loving enemies*, he is again at play with words; and puts such a sense on it, as never any did, to make that of himself ridiculous. "If love, says * he, carries with
" it *complacency, esteem and friendship*, and these
" are due to *all men*; what distinction can then be
" made between the *best and worst* of men?" But are esteem, complacency and friendship *always* included in the *notion* of love? Has not a parent oftentimes a very tender affection for a very *undutiful* child, whose wicked conduct he abhors, and for whom as such he can have *no esteem*, in whom he can have *no complacency*? May he not *wish* his good, *pity* him, *mourn* over him, *pray* for him, *exhort* him and *intreat* him to amend his life? May not his heart glow with *good-will* to him, and *kindness* breath in his expressions and shine out in his carriage, nay and direct his hand, when, with *pain* to himself, he gives needful correction? And is it not of *this* kind of love, our Saviour is to be understood? A love of *benevolence*, though not *complacency*? † Ye have heard that it hath been said, thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you. All and every one instances of *benevolence*, not of that love he describes. And the reason to enforce the precept, viz. the example of their heavenly father, speaks to the same purpose; That you may be the children of your father, who makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and unjust. In these instances he does them good, and shews himself *kind* to them. And so should his children carry it towards their enemies.

BUT when ‡ this author adds, "that though in the present state of things this cannot be well avoided,
" yet

* Page 310.

† Mat. v. 43, 44.

‡ Page 310.

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“yet God *certainly* does not love evil men, though
 “he *bears* with them for a time.” It would look
 exceeding strange, but that he is not always *consi-*
stent with himself. I should think that, according
 to him, the love of God to his creatures was all be-
nevolence. A Being absolutely happy in himself,
 after his way of arguing, can have no love of compla-
 cency for any Being besides himself; since such com-
 placency would infer an *accession* of felicity, and this,
 that he was not fully happy in himself. All the love
 God can have to his creatures, must be a love of be-
nevolence, whether they are good or evil, just or unjust.
 Those who partake in his bounty, must be the ob-
 jects of his benevolence. So that God does not on-
 ly bear with them, but is kind to the wicked, even
 those who by wicked works declare enmity to him; and
 so far shews love to them, the only kind of love
 which, according to him, he can shew to any.

It is nothing to the purpose to say “that in the
 “present state of things the sun must rise and the
 “rain fall, nor can it be otherwise?” for according to
 him, God could have no end, either in creating man,
 or his providence towards him, but his happiness; no
 not in the *sanctions* annexed to his laws. Their
 good is not only the principal, but sole end of God,
 in making man. It must therefore be for the com-
 mon good both of the good and evil, that the sun
 rises and the rain is sent. And yet he tells us “God
 “certainly loves not the evil, but only bears with
 “them for a time. No, not though he cannot but
 intend their happiness, nay their happiness to the
 utmost of which their nature is capable, and there-
 fore to make them as happy as the best. Would one
 think a man should talk at this rate, at the beginning
 of a book, and e’er he comes to the end, unsay all
 again, and talk backward, in order to disgrace one
 of the most sublime precepts of christian morality?
 Tell us here, that God does not love the evil, but on-

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ly bears with them for a time, that is, has no good will towards them, when yet a whole chapter, in the beginning of his book, is employed to prove, that even the punishment of the evil, in a future as well as the present life, is and must be solely for their good and happiness? Strange! that this notwithstanding, God should bear them no good-will, nor have any love for them!

BUT these instances of his common bounty, do indeed prove, that according to the scriptures, his tender mercies are over all his works. And his kindness to his enemies in this world, is a glorious example, worthy his creatures imitation, and very fit to enforce this excellent precept of our Saviour's religion, to love our enemies, or bear them hearty good-will; wish them well, pray for them, however ill they use us, and give them good words, in return for the bitterest curses, and most spiteful railing and revilings. And such there have been, most illustrious exemplifications of this precept, not only in the great author of our holy religion, but in it's first ministers also. They breath'd the most hearty good-will to their spiteful enemies and outrageous persecutors; and that to their last breath, and pour'd out prayers for them with their souls. They went forth, carrying a message of salvation to the world, when they knew they should only be hated and abused for it. And under all manner of ill treatment, persevered in this design, and sought and laboured to reconcile those to God, who pursued them with implacable malice, and the most inveterate and unrelenting spite. They wore out their flesh, wasted their spirits, and hazarded their lives to do them this service. They bore with their reproaches, insults, injuries and cruelty, and returned nothing but prayers, blessings, and the kindest entreaties for their souls' good. They endured hunger, thirst, nakedness. They wandered

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about without any certain dwelling. They laboured, working with their own hands. When reviled, they blessed: when persecuted, they patiently suffered it; when defamed, they entreated, and were content to be made the filth and offscouring of all things. How eminent, how illustrious was their benevolence or love, to those who hated and persecuted them? And are there any such precepts enforced by such examples, among his philosophers.

BUT ^d he has a maxim of Confucius, to set against this command. "We may have an aversion to an enemy without desiring revenge." Yet, is it not a much more glorious instance of virtue, to have kind propensions towards him? "The motions of nature are not always criminal." Admit it; yet, ill-will even to enemies may be criminal. "It is only the good man who can love and hate with reason." Is not this a clear and plain maxim of morality compared with those of Jesus Christ? And wonderfully instructive to one who would know how to regulate his love, and the motions of nature?

BUT, "Are not the passions of human nature given us of God, to be exercised on proper objects? Actions abstractedly considered, are not objects of love or hate, but persons for the sake of their actions." The first of these assertions is true, the other is an arrant mistake. For this being admitted, a parent can't hate wickedness in a child, without hating his child, nor a penitent hate his own crimes, without hating himself. A strange doctrine, though it were imported from China. "And are not the actions of some men too detestable, to create in us any sentiments but of aversion, so as to oblige us to bring them to condign punishment?" What has this to do with the precept of loving enemies? Because I must love mine enemies, must I not therefore bring an enemy to the publick to condign punishment.

punishment? Must I hate a child, because I detest his crimes? And why another man, if not a child? Nay, may I not, out of regard to the publick wrongs, against which it is not in my power to forgive, bring an heinous offender to punishment, whilst yet as injurious to me in particular, I bear him hearty good-will, wish him well, do him all the good offices I can, consistent with my duty to the publick, and heartily recommend him to divine mercy? And may I not pray for persecutors and those who hate and hurt me for Christ's sake, and do them good to my power, whom I cannot bring to justice, and who have laws and power on their side, to which I can make no resistance?

BUT says he, "Must we not learn to hate our selves, before we can learn to love those who hate us?" By no means. We must learn to moderate our love to ourselves, and subdue our passions, and not indulge to spite, ill-nature, revenge or wrath. But this is indeed to love, not hate ourselves. For is not this to calm and quiet our minds? Is it not for our ease and good to get rid of the tumults and tossings, the teizing and vexation, of such restless and uneasy passions? And if to this calm of mind, we can add a benevolent and kind disposition of spirit, towards such as provoke these passions, there is the most rational and relishing pleasure, added to the fore-mentioned calm. So far is this conduct from implying hatred to ourselves.

BUT, "Divines have been puzzled to find out that passage of our Saviour, * Ye have heard that it hath been said, thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy; whereas could it have been found, it would have shewn the divine precepts inconsistent with one another." Then it was not worth their while, surely, to puzzle themselves for this purpose. But in truth this is not a precept of the

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old Testament, but a Jewish tradition only, probably in misinterpretation of that passage of the law, "Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear a grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, by making the children of thy people and thy neighbour terms equivalent. *illud non videtur*

257 But he has found, it seems, a new Testament passage to set in opposition to this precept. "St. Paul *na* says, *2^a* If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap

coals of fire on his head. Treating him thus, cannot be an argument of love, since it is in order to

258 have divine vengeance fall on his head." As this text stands in the apostle, it is a debaration from re-

venge. *OT* Dearly beloved, *OT* avenge not yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, vengeance is mine, *OT* I will repay, *OT* saith the Lord. *OT* Therefore if

thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil

with good. In this connexion, what is the most likely meaning of *heaping coals on his head*? The effects

of fire are various. Sometimes it consumes, sometimes it purifies, and sometimes softens and melts.

And when in the same breath, and on the same argument, it follows, *OT* be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good, is it not most probably meant

in the last sense here? Does it look at all likely, that in the same sentence, we should be charged to suppress a vindictive disposition, and yet *OT* take revenge; or

solace ourselves with the prospect of God's taking the work into his hands, and exacting full retribution? Would this be love? No really, *OT* now *OT* 259

260 But suppose it should imply, that divine retributions will be severe, and God will take care to punish those that implacably hate and continue injurious, notwithstanding kind offices on our part, yet

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^a Lev. xix. 18.

ⁱ Page 320.

^k Rom. xii. 16.

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it is not an act of love to continue kindly affected to them; to heap favours on them; and to endeavour, by this means, to overcome and melt them; tho' if these endeavours fail, God will avenge at last. Indeed to do this with a design to aggravate their guilt, and make their punishment heavier and last, would be worse than to avenge ourselves. It is only forbearing revenge for the present, to have it more fully at length. Nothing of this sort can be fairly implied in the apostle's expressions, or supposed to be favoured or allowed by them.

THE love of God and the Redeemer, shine out with the most lovely and attractive lustre, in the evangelical dispensation. And love to God and men, the most free, disinterested, generous and comprehensive love; not only to countrymen, friends and benefactors, but even to strangers and enemies, breaths in the precepts, and hath reigned in the hearts of those who have professed this religion, and triumphed in their lives over revenge, hatred, malice and spite. And it is for the credit, the honour of christianity, that it teaches a morality so sublime, and so much transcending; not only that of the Greeks and Romans, but even his Chinese philosopher. And to one, who seems in such raptures, for telling us, "The law of nature, by binding us to an imitation of God, renders love and kindness as extensive as human nature, and that this heavenly, this godlike temper, must render a man happy in himself; and, as far as is in his power, makes the whole world for to be;" one would think such a precept should be even more transporting.

Surely were he not under the manifest power of prejudice, and greatly partial, he could not but see that christian morality is much more fitted to make a man happy in himself, and the world about him; or, if this should be doubted, because this loving

temper may not seem so consistent with *opposition* to disturbers of the publick peace, (tho' that, from what has been said, is but mistake). It is certainly much for the honour of *christianity*, to teach so *universal* a beneyolence, and carry virtue to so great an height, as not only to *love those which love us, which even publicans and sinners, men of the worst lives and characters, may do*, but those who hate and injure us; and herein shew that we are *born of God*, and have him for our father, and endeavour to be like him, who makes his sun to shine on the good and evil, and sends his rain on the just and unjust. But,

Secondly, "RULES of morality, says" he, should "be suited to men's circumstances, plainly describing that conduct they require. Is not this the design of the *municipal laws* in every country? What benefit could subjects have from laws written in so loose, general and undetermin'd a manner? as, *Lend, hoping for nothing again. If any man will sue thee at law and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. Of him who takes away thy goods, ask them not again. Laws that seem to forbid all self-defence, requiring us not to resist evil; or that bid us take no thought for the morrow, for life, and that by arguments drawn from lillies neither toiling nor spinning.*"

THIS seems to be a double charge, that the precepts of Christ are too general, and descend not enough to particulars, as do the *municipal laws* of every country; and that they are too loose and indeterminate in their sense: which has in part been already considered.

WHAT he means by the *first* of these, is not easy to understand. The religion of *Jesus*, is a general religion for all mankind, supposing its propagation so general; and as it is for men of *different* nations, kingdoms and states, its precepts there-

therefore are *general*. More particular laws, must have been fitted to men, in their *particular circumstances*, either as individuals, or members of a particular community. How *voluminous* must the sacred writings have been for this purpose? And how much must each man have turned over, to have known what, in all circumstances, was *particularly* enjoined him; and how much more to have known, how one *this* circumstanced, must act in *that* particular community? And as circumstances vary continually, how much more to know, how his conduct must *hereupon* be altered. His labour in searching his rule, must have been *immense*, upon this supposition; and yet in a manner *needless*. Common *reason* and *discretion*, together with the *laws* of particular communities, being sufficient direction for applying general rules on *particular occasions*.

CHRISTIANITY makes no changes in communities and their *constitutions*, meddles not with *civil settlements* and *administrations*, but leaves to *sovereigns* their natural and civil rights, and to subjects *theirs*; and kingdoms and states to be governed by their *own* laws, except where *they* may *interfere* with higher obligations to the supreme ruler. When therefore it bids *servants* to be *obedient to their masters*, and *please them in all things*, it breaks in upon no *customs* or *usages* of particular countries; but where *servants* are the *property* of their masters, supposes them *such*; where hired only to do work upon *agreed terms*, supposes them *such*, and requires obedience *accordingly*. And though the precepts are thus generally express, they must be understood with *limitations*. They must not obey them, in *any* obedience to God, nor are they bound to obey in matters manifestly *unfit* and *unreasonable* in themselves, *beyond* or *besides* mutual agreements, but as far as the *nature* of their subjection and service requires. Though in *that age* of the world, and *those* regions, where the gospel was first published, *servi-*

inde was so common, that *servant* and *slave* were, in a manner, equipollent terms. In which case the expression might be more general, than seems to suit with our age and nation, where few servants are *slaves*, and most are as much *sui juris*, as their masters.

AND yet, had he fairly quoted the texts, and not by halves, the expressions had been less liable to exception. The one runs thus, " *Servants obey your masters in all things — not with eye-service as man-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God.* What is this, but performing all their lawful commands, doing all the service they owe them, whether in sight or out of sight, as those who fear God, and seek to approve themselves to him. The other °, *Exhort servants to be obedient to their own masters and please them well in all things: not answering again, not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity.* — What is this, but bidding them study in all their service to please their masters, and act with all faithfulness, without wronging them or talking unhandsonely to them.

WHEN he tells us, " Though we are bid to render Cesar the things that are Cesar's, and render to every man his dues, must we not learn from the laws in every nation who is Cesar, and what are his dues? And from reason and the laws of the country, what are all men's dues? " Most certainly. What then? Are not these loose and indeterminate rules of conduct? No more than such general rules must be. Would he have had the religion of Jesus, have settled the succession to the throne in every kingdom of the universe, and what their dues? And what the particular dues of every private man in every country? Is this a reasonable, or a monstrous expectation? Does not christian religion suppose men to have reason, to apply such

general rules to particular cases? Though he is not fair even here. Our Saviour's saying of *rendering to Cesar, &c.* is not properly preceptive, but a cautious answer to an enlarging question, *if it were lawful to pay tribute to Cesar?* A direct answer he declines, but bids them *render to Cesar the things that are Cesar's, and to God the things that are God's.*

THE Apostle indeed delivers a precept to the same purpose, but enters into several particulars. *Render therefore to all their dues. Tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour.* This also is a general precept, but not quite so general as he represents it, who only cites, *Render to all their dues.* And how should it have been more particular? not unless the apostle had tack'd a book of rates to it, for every nation and port of the world? or specified the particular reverence and honour, to be paid to the several ranks and orders of men in every kingdom or state, from the prince down to the constable? It is determinate enough, for every one's conduct. It determines that men have dues, that those should be paid, and it leaves, as he says, *laws and common reason* to determine what these dues are. And what could a religion, designed for the direction of all men's conduct, do more? Must it have specified what every man must do, in every particular case?

As to the other precepts he finds fault with, *Lend, hoping for nothing again,* plainly mean, help those that need, without expecting a return from them. No one ever understood it of lending, where there is no need, but just for the present, without expecting what is lent to be returned. *Prove all things,* with which he elsewhere finds fault, as too general a precept, as it stands connected, is plainly limited to a particular subject of enquiry, *Prove all things;*

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boldly *fast* that which is good. This very author at the beginning of his book cites it as a proof that the Apostles, in making profelytes, thought themselves obliged to recommend an impartial search. Strange! that the nature and sense of the precept should be quite changed, and that become unintelligible before the end of it! And that he should apprehend, that in this precept, men should think themselves enjoined to make proof of a piece of ordinance, of a carpenter's rule, a sample of dye-stuff, &c. And why else he should find fault with the generality of the precept, I can't imagine.

THE general commands of *not resisting evil, but yielding one's cloak to one who by law would take away one's coat, of not taking goods again from one who has taken them away*, have indeed been misunderstood by some christians, as forbidding self-defence, or forcible resistance of injurious violence. But what then? Must their meaning be dark and perplexed, because some have misunderstood them? The expressions are plainly *proverbial*, in which case the words are not ordinarily taken in their literal meaning, yet are commonly understood. There are such *proverbs* in use in almost all nations, and, in general account, discover much of the genius and wisdom of a people, and are commonly used and understood. And the wise men among the heathens have delivered short *maxims* of morality, in the same manner. And the meaning of these precepts is obvious enough. Not implying, that in a Christian state, where, for the good of the public, the laws require that lawless persons should be opposed, restrained, and, when it is necessary, brought to condign punishment, all resistance to them and prosecution of them should be forborn: But that christians should subdue their passions, keep down rage and resentment, pass by slight wrongs, and

and be ready to receive a fresh injury, than, with
ridge and scath, or with malice and spite, revenge
former. And if they do prosecute an offender for
the public good, should be careful, that *malice*,
spite, *will*, *nature*, &c. to the party, mingle as little
as possible with a concern for the public in the pro-
secution. Not that they should not *reclaim* goods
borrowed and detained, or forcibly taken from
them, but should consider the necessities of such
a detained, be as compassionate to him, as *the* re-
gard to the public will admit, and deal *mercifully*
with such an one when in our power, and bear pa-
tiently with him, when we cannot resist him, or fight
ourselves, in a particular manner, that we should
be thus patient under persecuting violence. Is not
this, or somewhat to the same purpose, the com-
mon meaning put on such expressions? And is
there any thing in them, but what is reasonable
and humane? And is it not highly injurious to *absti-*
nians and their religion, to suppose men must lay by
their *reason* and *understanding*, when they read the
scriptures, and take their meaning to be just what
the words sound, how absurd soever in its self, or
inconsistent with reason? That is, they must read
the *bible*, in such a manner, as would make *non-*
sense of every writer in the world. As to taking no thought for the morrow, for our
life, the translation may mislead a very careless rea-
der, and prompt a thought, that he is to use no
care nor foresight about his affairs. But the author
must know, the *original* means, no anxious, so-
licitous and disquieting thought. We should not
perplex our minds about evil that may hereafter be-
fall us, but whilst we are using our best *prudence*, to
procure good and avoid evil, trust God and his
providence with the disposal of our affairs. Nor
should we take such thought about these things as
will

* *μεριμνάω*, sollicitè curo, used in both Evangelists.

will take us off from more momentous ones, things of everlasting consequence. And is it not, in this light, a very reasonable precept?

And though he would make the allusion to lillies here ridiculous, because they *soil not nor spin*, as birds are said neither to *sow, nor reap, nor gather in to harvest*, yet, as it here connects, it is a very beautiful allusion, and carries much force in it, to our Saviour's purpose. He dissuades from anxious thought and concern for food and raiment, and advises an humble trust in God, and dependence on him for both. To encourage this, he bids them turn their eyes to the birds of the air, and lillies of the field, and consider how the one were fed, who could make no provision for themselves, and how gaily the others were deck'd, who could contribute nothing to this fine appearance. And could they think God regardless of them, or deficient in proper care for the more noble, than the less noble parts of the creation; especially if they shew'd a preference of esteem for better things, and a bent of mind to pursue and secure them?

BUT that the reader may judge, how little reason the author has to find fault, it may not be improper to transcribe the passage entire. "Take no (anxious) thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor for your body, what ye shall put on, (or, how you shall be fed and cloathed.) Is not the life more than meat, and the body more than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air, they sow not, neither do they reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly father feedeth them. Are not ye much better than they? (and will he let you lack what is necessary?) And why take ye (anxious) thought for raiment? Consider the lillies of the field, how they grow, they soil not, neither do they spin, and yet Solomon in all his glories, was not arrayed like one of these,

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^u Mat. vi. 25—end.

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these, (made not to gay an appearance.) Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no (anxious) thought, &c. For after all these things do the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly father knoweth that you have need of these things, (he is not ignorant nor regardless of your state and wants.) But seek ye first (or chiefly, which explains the Gentiles seeking before-mentioned) the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you, (by his blessing on your honest care and diligence.) Take therefore no (anxious) thought for the morrow; for the morrow will take (such) thought for the things of its self. (or bring its burthen of cares along with it, which need not therefore be brought before-hand in to this day,) sufficient to the day is the evil thereof. It means not that we should throw by all care and foresight, and use no means to provide against to-morrow's wants, or guard against to-morrow's ill and dangers, but only unnecessary or immoderate thought, taking off from due attention to our chief business, or what is attended with disquietude, and implies distrust of God: what unfit for present duty, destroys the relish of present enjoyments, makes fearful, heartless and desponding, nor considers how unlikely it is, (that God who cares for birds, and beasts, and plants, should neglect mankind, especially those amongst them, who seek the kingdom of God, and his righteousness. And is not this both a wise and kind command? But he has not yet done. Thirdly, He tells us, what are precepts in scripture neglected now by every one, as not founded in reason. The command of abstaining from blood, was given after the deluge to the then whole race of mankind, and often repeated in the law. And in the new testament, the same precept is enjoined the Gentile

“ converts,

"converts, by the unanimous decree of the Apostles
 "and by the *Holy Ghost* too, and that as necessary, may
 "equally so with abstaining from fornication; and by
 "all christians, for many ages, was thought to be of
 "perpetual obligation. Yet who is now so ridicu-
 "lous, as out of religion to abstain from black-pud-
 "ding?"

THIS command, as he says, was after the deluge given to the whole race of mankind. And hence it is very probable, that sacrifices were customary, by *divine institution*, from the first sin of man. We do not read before the flood of any allowance to mankind, to eat flesh. This being now given, the blood which in sacrifice was poured out, is forbidden to be eaten; and most likely for this reason. For when, as he says, this command is repeated in the law, this is assigned as the reason for it: *Whatsoever man there be of the house of Israel, or the strangers that sojourn among you, that eateth any manner of blood, I will set myself against that soul—and will cut him off from among his people. Why? For the life of the flesh is in the blood. And I have given it you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls. For it is the blood that maketh atonement for the soul.* Because God had hallowed it for this sacred use, it was not to be made common food. As this is declared to be the reason of the prohibition under the law, it looks very likely to me, that the same was the reason of the first prohibition, though not there expressly mentioned.

AND if this was the reason of the prohibition, the obligation must cease, on the cessation of sacrificing, the reason for it subsisting no longer. So that after the destruction of the last temple and the abrogation of the Jewish worship and laws relating to it, it was no longer binding. Indeed whilst the temple still stood, it did seem fit to the *Apostles* under

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^y Lev. xvii. 10, 11.

^z Acts xv. 28, 29.

the direction of the *Holy Ghost*, to bind a regard to it as necessary on the first converts of the *Gentiles* to christianity, who seem to have been all *proselytes of the gate*, the same that in the *old testament* are called the *strangers sojourning among the Jews*, or worshippers of the God of *Israel*, though not, by a full conformity to their religion, incorporated with them, as the *proselytes of righteousness* were. But it is bound on them no otherwise than the three other precepts peculiarly obliging them under the *Jewish law*. And that this injunction was binding only on them, and not the converts from proper *Gentilism*, or among the *idolatrous Gentiles*, seems to me clearly made out by the learned and judicious author of *Miscellanea Sacra*: these being necessary to such *Gentiles* during the continuance of the *Jewish state* and law of *Moses*, but not on other *Gentiles*. These having never been under the law of *Moses*, were not bound, as such, to abstain from blood. And as their conversion to christianity, imply'd a renunciation of all *idolatrous rules*, and *sacrificing* amongst the rest, the obligation of the precept as given to the sons of *Noah* must cease of course, with the cessation of all sacrifice.

NOR is there any hint of this prohibition, in any of *Paul's* epistles to the churches formed among the *idolatrous Gentiles*, but plain allowance to buy and eat *whatever was sold in the shambles*; and much of the priest's share of the sacrifices, and black-puddings too, no doubt, were there sold. Yet is there much in them against *fornication* and *uncleaness*; which is a plain evidence they stand not on the same foot, though abstinence from them is made alike necessary in this decree. Not because equally binding on all men from the reason of things, nor the perpetuity of the command, but because they stand together.

a Lev. xvii.

b Vol. 2, Ess. iv.

together as prohibitions in *Mose's* law, to *Pharisees* of the gate: and would his *gamb* had been as

But should any think it still, as, he says, all christians once did, a perpetual prohibition, and for that reason abstain from *black-pudding*: I know nothing ridiculous in it, unless it be a ridiculous thing to *fantasize*, what a person thinks God has forbidden. Men may possibly be *weak* who do so, and in some measure *superstitious*; but every thing that is the effect of *weakness*, is not to be turn'd into a *jest*, by any but such as are privileged from mistake: which I am sure is not the privilege of *this author*, how boastful soever of the sufficiency of his reason. But he goes on

Who now thinks it his duty, to wash his neighbour's feet? though a thing not only commanded by a dying Saviour, after the most solemn manner, and under no less penalty than having no part in him, but enforced and inculcated by his own example." This author has a most unhappy or perverse talent, at citing and interpreting scripture. There is not a word of our Saviour's commanding this, under the penalty of having no part in him. Indeed when *Peter* demurr'd to his washing his feet, he tells him, that if he wash'd him not, he would have no part in him. But no hint is given, that their not washing one another's feet, would deprive them of all interest in him. It is true, that after he had washed them round, and sat down, he tells them, that as he had done, they should do, and that he had left them an example for this end: immediately subjoining, *The servant is not greater than his Lord, nor he that is sent than him who sent him*; that is, the servant is less than his lord, and they that are sent, *Et c.* He being therefore their lord and master, and having stoop'd

^c Page 314. ^d John xiv. 6, 7, 8. ^e Ver. 14, 15.

^f Ver. 16.

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for you, as to ~~was~~ their ~~an~~ ~~for~~ ~~dis~~ they should do as he had done, and follow his example; not in the particular action, but the humility, condescension, and goodness appearing in it. For it does not appear, that ever the ~~apostles~~ observed this precept according to the letter, nor took it in any other sense, than as recommending *humility*, and the doing the lowest offices of love for each other, on all proper occasions.

But, ~~it~~ our Saviour commands men, ~~not to~~ "swear at all." And St. James impresses the same precept, saying, *Above all things swear not.* And by the manner wherein it is introduced by our Saviour, it seems chiefly to relate to oaths taken on solemn occasions. It is said of old, *thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform to the Lord thy oaths.* But I say to you, swear not at all. Yet none besides Quakers swear not at all. In all these general precepts a limitation must be allowed. Reason must be taken with them, when Christians read and interpret scripture. And the tendency of actions must be taken in, to judge of the lawfulness of them, tho' not in his sense merely as they are for the good of man. But certain it is, that our Saviour is not to be understood as prohibiting oaths on solemn occasions, when requisite; unless he can be supposed by his own example, to contradict his own solemn commands. For at his trial, he answers the high priest upon oath, when adjured by the living God, to tell if he were the Christ. And upon other solemn occasions, when not before a magistrate, his Amen, Amen, usually render'd *verily, verily*, is tantamount to it. But Paul, on some occasions, swears formally in his epistles. Twice he does so in one chapter of his *God is true* (or God is a faithful witness &c. &c.) our word towards you was not yea and nay. I

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did not talk forward and backward. And again,
^k *I call God for a witness on my soul (or life) that
 to spare you, I came not yet to Corinth.* Which is
 appealing to God with an imprecation. So else-
 where: ^l *The things which I write unto you; behold,
 before God, (or in the presence of God) I lye not.*
 Now what is an oath, but a solemn calling God to
 witness the truth of what is said, especially with an
 imprecation? Paul therefore could not understand
 this precept, without limitation; as do the Quakers.
 Nor is there any reason they should.

Nor does the connexion, as this author suggests;
 at all require it. For though it be immediately
 subjoin'd to that precept of Moses, *thou shalt not
 forswear thy self, but shalt perform to the Lord thine
 oaths*; yet what follows plainly shews, that he is
 to be understood of oaths in common conversation.
 He tells his hearers, he came not to annul any
 of these laws; but to rescue them from the false
 glosses of the Jewish Doctors, is the plain scope of
 his discourse. This law therefore stands as it did
 before. But the Jews thought oaths in common
 conversation, if they were not false, might be used.
 If they were not forsworn, they might swear lightly,
 and by less solemn oaths. This sort of swear-
 ing our Saviour utterly forbids, as also the swearing
 by any thing else but God: *But I say to you, swear
 not at all, neither by heaven, for it is God's throne,
 neither by the earth, for it is his footstool, neither by
 Jerusalem for it is the city of the great king: neither
 shalt thou swear by thine head, for thou canst not
 make one hair white or black.* Were any of these
 forms of swearing, on solemn occasions, among the
 Jews? No certainly, but in common talk. And
 therefore it follows, *But let your talk (ὁ λόγος ὑμῶν)
 be yea, yea, nay, nay; for what is more than these,
 cometh of evil, or the evil one, (τὸ πονηρὸν).* Is it
 not

^k Ver. 23.

^l Gal. i. 20.

not very manifest, that *our Saviour*, when he bids us *not swear at all*, is not to be understood of oaths on *solemn occasions*, or before a *magistrate*, but of appealing by oath to any besides the living God, and lightly swearing in common conversation. This he forbids, and requires that in common discourse, men should only plainly *affirm* or *deny*, and not unnecessarily interlard their discourse with either *oaths* or *asseverations*. These carry an intimation either of *distrust* in another, or consciousness of the want of *sincerity* in one's self.

AND the precept in *St. James* is exactly parallel, *"Swear not at all, neither by heaven, nor by earth, nor by any other oath, but let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay, lest ye fall into condemnation."* Indeed he says, *above all things* swear not. And this intimates how great a *reverence* men should entertain for so sacred a thing as an oath; and how much God is offended with the *profaning* it, though men are so prone, *without any temptation*, to mix such with their *common talk*.

WHAT he ^a says concerning *usury*, is with an air of great *self-sufficiency*. *"Were there ever so many texts in the New as well as Old Testament against usury, and these too back'd with the unanimous authority of all the fathers; yet the forbidding it now, especially in trading nations, would be immoral."* This is very peremptory. It is no wonder he should make so light of the *authority of the fathers*, who can make so light of *divine authority*. But why immoral? Because it would *cramp trade*, and nations could not be so rich without it? Certainly this is not fact, for if money were lent *without usury*, trade would every whit as well flourish, if not better. But is nothing *immoral* that creates a trade? Another *author* has

written

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written a book to prove *private vices* a *public benefit*; if he can make this out, will he thereby prove that these *vices* are not *immoral*? According to his way of speaking, this must be the consequence. And do not *these writers* shew a very great concern for *virtue* and *morality*?

I AM indeed of his mind, that lending upon usury is no immorality. He could find no prohibition of it in the *new testament*, or be sure we should have had it produced. And the prohibitions of usury in the *old testament* was not in a *trading nation*, but a nation of *husbandmen*; for such the *Jews* were, having few ports and little trade. Nor does it appear to have been *utterly* prohibited amongst them. The prohibition in two places, in the law, is upon supposition that the person to whom money is lent [°] is *poor*, [°] *waxen poor*, and *fallen to decay*. Uncapable, for want of *stock*, to improve his *estate*, which by the law he could not alienate. His brother who had money was to relieve and help him by lending money without expecting its return *with increase*. Whether this were for the good of *his people*, God their supreme ruler certainly knew, much better than *this author*. And should he pronounce it *immoral*, because not for *their good*, even supposing the prohibition as to the *Israelites* general, and not thus restrained, it would prove nothing that I know, but his own *unreasonable confidence*. Suppose trade and enlarged commerce would have proved the *corruption* of their religion, and tended to introduce idolatry, was not this a reason why God should restrain them from trade? And this for their good too? unless wealth be the *supreme good* of a nation, and so *this* be promoted it matters not how the *pure worship* of God is corrupted. I wish *this author* had given no grounds here and elsewhere, to think this his sentiment.

BUT

° Exod. xxii. 25, ° Lev. xxv. 35.

BUT whatever were the peculiar reason of this prohibition to the *Israelites*, and how far soever it extended, it is plain from the *third passage* in the law, relating to this matter, that it was not universally forbidden, as a thing evil in its own nature. For though *usury on money, or victuals*, is prohibited towards a brother, to a stranger it is allowed, and as some of the *Jews* think commanded; that is, that they should take usury for what they lent a stranger. They had little trade among themselves, but they lived near *Tyre and Sidon*, the two most famous *ports* in the world. These could improve money in trade, and if they lent here, they were allowed to take increase: though not when they lent to their brethren, who could not make such advantage of it. To these they might lend, for any thing I can see in the command concerning it. God had his reasons for the prohibition, and these good ones, and likely it is, that *their* good as his people was aimed at in it. But as a thing naturally evil, it is not forbidden, because it must have then been prohibited with respect to *strangers* as well as *brethren*.

Sub 6. II. *His Objections to the Sacrifice of Christ as atoning for Sin, considered.*

ANOTHER particular exception he has against Christianity, is the doctrine of *Christ's* being a sacrifice for sin. This is indeed a doctrine of scripture. And tho it may have been obscured by the talk of *metaphysical divines*, has nothing in it repugnant to reason, or the nature of God or man, whatever he suggests to the contrary. It is the great scope of the *epistle to the Hebrews*, to set forth *Christ* as the great high priest of his people, and the shedding his blood, as a sacrifice to purge

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fin. We there read that *Christ glorified not himself, to be made an high priest, but he that says to him, Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee.* As in another place, he saith, *thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchisedeck.* He is, upon comparison, preferred, in many respects to the priests under the law: *They were many because mortal, he because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood, or unpassable, in which he is to have no successor.* And of this priesthood, one, and a chief act, was to offer himself in sacrifice. And so he is said, *now once, in the end of the world to have appeared to put away sin, by the sacrifice of himself.* *He was once offered to bear the sins of many.* And by this one offering has for ever perfected them that are sanctified, or made full purgation of their sin. *And as almost all things under the law were purged with blood, and without shedding of blood, there was no remission, so we are said to be washed from our sins, by his own blood, and to have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sin, and he is set forth as a propitiation or propitiatory (ἱλαστήριον) through faith in his blood.* Himself therefore is set forth not only as our high priest, but a sacrifice for us, by the shedding whose blood, we are purged from sin, and obtain remission through faith in him, upon our repentance and return to God.

THAT this doctrine of Christ's sacrificing himself for sin, has nothing in it absurd in its self, repugnant with reason, unworthy of God, or to the just prejudice of our religion, may, I should think, be made out to the satisfaction of every unprejudiced mind.

It has been made appear already, that, though God is too happy in himself, to receive any advantage

^f Heb. v. 5, 6. ^g Ch. vii. 23, 24. ^h ἀπαγορεύεται.

ⁱ Ch. ix. 26, 28. ^k Ch. x. 14. ^l Ch. ix. 22.

^m Rev. i. 5. ⁿ Eph. i. 7. ^o Rom. iii. 25. ^p Vid. p. 12, 13, &c.

vantage or additional bliss, from the obedience of his creatures, or any real harm or disturbance, from their disobedience, and whatever is said of his being pleased or displeased with them, must be understood consistently with this; yet, some actions of theirs he must approve, and disapprove the contrary ones, or he would not act agreeably with the truth and reason of things. For on this foot some are to be approved, and others disallowed.

BUT how should the great ruler of the world, shew dislike to actions, naturally to be disapproved by him, but by prohibiting them first, and punishing for them when done. His prohibition, indeed, shews his dislike of the action, or thing prohibited, but in case his creatures slight his prohibition, and do what he forbids, is not his dislike to them, for this undutiful behaviour, as fit to be shewn, as his dislike of the thing done, by forbidding it? Nay, if *this* author is to be believed, "Actions abstractedly considered, are not the objects of either love or hatred, but only persons for the sake of their actions." In this, as has been shewn, he is undoubtedly mistaken: but men for doing what God dislikes and forbids, are deservedly the objects of his dislike and displeasure. And how should his dislike and displeasure be manifested, but by punishing for the fault? Does not *this* author own, there are sanctions enforcing the observance of the natural law? Natural evil annexed to moral evil, by divine constitution, painful reflections and self-upbraidings for what men have done, besides other miseries the natural effects and consequents of sin? This way God expresses his displeasure for their faults, according to his own account.

IF over and above this, God should think fit to threaten disobedience with death, the forfeiture of life and being, according to the account of scripture, was this any absurdity in its self? Or was it a stretch

of power in the supreme ruler of the world, the author of their life and being, to suspend the enjoyment of it, on men's obedience to his laws; and guard them with such a sanction if he pleased, whether his laws were *natural* or *positive*? Was he bound to continue them in being at all? Or whether they *obeyed* or *disobeyed*, yet give them a *right* to life? and to make them happy, however they carried it towards him? From what has been said, there is no *foundation* for such a sentiment. If God suspended the enjoyment of life on man's obedience to his will, he did nothing but what he had a *right* to do, what was consistent with *all* the perfections of his nature. The scriptural account of this matter therefore, has nothing in it *absurd*, or *repugnant* to reason, which informs us that God required the first man to obey what he commanded under *penalty* of *death*. If such *forfeiture* was not *naturally* included in the sanctions of the natural law, it might be positively declared to be his will, that the *disobedient* should *die*, or be liable to death, if to his sovereign and unerring wisdom it seemed good. And that thus he hath done, the *scripture* informs us.

AND is there nothing in *common experience*, that countenances and confirms this account? and hints *death* to be the penal consequent of sin? *All men* now are liable to death. And this is either the constitution of nature, or it is *penal*. If natural, why should death, even that of the *body*, be so much the natural *abhorrence* of all men? Why should *life*, even bodily life, be so *universally* desired, and that under circumstances no way encouraging *such* desires, nor apt to recommend the prolongation of life, if death were utterly in nature *inevitable*, and man made mortal by his *original* constitution? Is there any thing of this sort visible in inferior creatures? If by instinct they are prompted to shun *present* and *apparent* evils, yet do they discover any
value

value for life, or concern to have it prolonged, or any dreadful apprehensions of death? This is peculiar to mankind, who all seem, by *instinct*, to love life and dread death, and that as *penal*. And indeed, can any man give any rational account why man should die, in these circumstances, if he were *wholly* innocent. Our author, upon his principles, I am sure cannot. It is reasonable therefore to believe, according to the scripture-account, that *death is the wages of sin*. And men so naturally *fond* of life, are yet liable to death, because they are *sinners*, and have *forfeited* life into the hands of their maker and sovereign. So that this seems to have been a *sanction*, super-added to the *internal* sanctions of the law of nature, to deter from disobedience. And men dread death as *betokening* divine displeasure and the *punishment* of sin. Why should not that fondness for life, implanted in every man's nature, be gratified, if sin had not forfeited this favour? The *scriptural* account stands, thus far, confirmed, by the *reason* and *state* of things. And *death* looks likely to be, as scripture assures us it is, the *punishment* of sin. Not only are men liable to *internal pangs*, and *uneasy reflections* by reason of sin, but they are liable to *death* also upon this account.

BESIDES is God the sovereign of the world utterly unconcerned about his *honour* and *rights*? Is it fit he should be so? If these are *valuable* in themselves, they must be so to *him*; or else he acts not according to the *nature* or *truth* of things? And this must infer a concern, that his *creatures* put a value on them too. Nay, if they are valuable only, as *this author* pretends, for the sake of *those* governed by him, yet as far as he is concerned for *this* good, he must be concerned that his *creatures* and *subjects* should have and shew a like concern for them. And if they shew a slight or contempt of them by

wilful disobedience, is it not fit that he should *manifest* this concern, by dispeasure against them; and this by *inflicting* threatned punishment? Or would his subjects think him *in earnest* in his prohibitions, or the punishment denounced to enforce them, should they go altogether unpunished? Is not sin against him an heinous evil in *its self*, and deeply injurious to *him*, though it can do him no *real harm*? If it be, he must think *thus* of it, or not think according to *truth*. And should not *all his creatures* think thus of it too? And how shall they be deeply imprest with a sense of this, in case, especially, of a *general corruption* of mankind, but by shewing awfully his displeasure for it. And how can this be done, but by some *peculiar punishment* inflicted for it?

AND *who* should undergo such punishment? Should the guilty be *all* punished, there would be no room for extending mercy to *any*; which yet must appear very becoming so *good* a Being as God. Should some particular offenders have been singled out to suffer, the bare suffering what *their* sins deserved, had not set the *guilt* of sin and the *displeasure* of God against it, in any light, *strong enough* to have imprest the body of his subjects with a deep and due sense of it, nor therefore sufficiently *discouraged* from it. And had they been punished *above* their demerit, themselves would have accused him as *unjust*. And yet a *just regard* to his rights, even supposing him to have taken the government of the world upon him, for the *sake* of his creatures, seems to have required such *animadversion*. Authority freely assumed by so *glorious* a Being, for so *gracious* an end, should not be trampled on by rebellions subjects, without their being made sensible, by some *awful* punishment, what *heinous* evil they had done, how much God was *displeased* for it, and what *they* must expect by their continuance in such a course. Less than this was not so likely to guard his authority from

from contempt. Which certainly it concerns him to do, as a thing fit in *its self*, and for the good of the world. And much more, if he governs the world, not merely for his creatures sake, but to display his several perfections in his government, his *truth*, his *purity*, his *justice*, as well as his *wisdom* and *goodness*: And therefore, in case of a violation of his laws, to shew his displeasure by *severely punishing* for it, that *others* might be careful to avoid like sins, and the *guilty* themselves, if again received to favour, might not think it a *light* matter to transgress. Which most men would be apt to do, if on repentance *only*, they might expect an *easy* pardon. And in case the punishment inflicted, be what the *sinner* himself deserved, how proper would this be to *redeem* him from it?

AND to undergo this punishment, that the guilty might be delivered from it, some other must be a *substitute* in his room. And the more *innocent* and *excellent* this substitute were, the more *near* and *dear* to God, the better would the ends of punishing be answered. The more would God's *hatred* to sin, and his *grace* and *good-will* to sinners, and his *high regard* to his sovereign authority, be shewn by appointing him to *this office*.

AND for this end he was pleased to pitch on his *only begotten son*, who, whether he were of the *same nature* with his father, God, in the proper sense, of God, which has been the prevailing sentiment of christians, down from the *Nicene Council*; or the *most glorious* of all the productions of his power, begotten of him *before* all ages and worlds, as *others* hold; must set all the motives to his punishment, in the *strongest light* possible. When, as sinful men had, by transgressing God's law, become liable to death, he freely consented, on the father's signifying his pleasure, to assume *our flesh*, and die for men, and redeem them from *death* and the
grave,

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grave, procure immortality for them, and a blessed immortality for all, who believe him and *obey the gospel*. For these ends he consented to be made a *sacrifice*, and in *this sense* expiated or made atonement for sin. And by *bearing men's sins*, or being punished, thus far in their *room* and *stead*, redeemed them from the punishment, their sin brought upon them.

AND what is there in *this*, repugnant to reason or *unworthy* of God? Is it not fit, he should have and shew a *concern* for his rights, and *displeasure* against sin, (which carries in it *contrariety* to his nature, as well as *contradiction* to his laws) as well as *love* and *goodness* to sinners, when he pardons the penitent? And that for the *good* of his subjects in general, as well as for his *own* honour? Does he not in this view at once look *awful* and *amiable*? Do not *majesty* and *mercy* shine out in this transaction, and prompt veneration and devotion in the creature? And is not this becoming God? To look at once *venerable* and *attractive*? To appear an irreconcilable *enemy* to sin, and yet a gracious *friend* to the relenting sinner? How fitly does this at once excite the sinner's *fears*, and raise his *hopes*? beget an humble *confidence* in God, inflame the heart with *gratitude* and *devotion* to him, and prompt a *detestation* and *abhorrence* of sin, which appears so much his *aversion*, in the most surprizing display of his *grace* and *good-will* to sinners. Does not every perfection of God, shine out here? *Glorious* majesty, *spotless* purity, *consummate* wisdom, *awful* justice, and the most *amazing* grace and mercy? Do not all the considerations concur, proper to *move* and *melt* the ingenuous mind? that can *deter* from sin, or *draw* to God? And whilst men have appetites and passions, and these under corrupt *biasses* *within*, and are beset with temptations *without*, *fear* is as necessary to make them religious, as *love*. Where both

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co-operate, *duty* will be more readily, freely and exactly performed, and *sin* more carefully avoided.

I CANNOT therefore but think, that both in *its self*, and its natural tendency and *good influence* on religion, this method of forgiving sin and saving sinners, is every way worthy of God, and demonstrative of the greatest *wisdom* and *goodness* in conjunction. And that it sets God before his creatures in a much more becoming and advantageous light, than if he had appeared all *fondness* to his creatures, without concern for his *own* authority and honour: Ready to forgive at once, without requiring *any* reparation for the wrongs done him by sin, and deterring those he pardons from sinning again, by some *exemplary* punishment. If in this dispensation he appears in *dreadful* majesty, he does at the same time appear most *gracious* and *benevolent*. And, sure, his love shines out with more *engaging* lustre, amidst these beams of *awful* majesty. When just concern for his rights, required that he should *punish* sin, yet that the guilty might themselves escape the punishment to which they were obnoxious, he did not spare his *only son*, but *delivered him up to death for us all*. Herein indeed was love. To forgive sin in *this* manner, is much more *endearing*, than freely to have pardoned sinners, on their repentance *only*.

FROM what has been said, the death of Christ as a *sacrifice*, I would hope, appears to have nothing in it absurd, repugnant to reason, unworthy of God, or to the just *disparagement* of christianity. If in him God punished sin, and his death redeemed the penitent and believing sinner from death, and entitled him to an *happy immortality*, he was a *sacrifice* of atonement for them. And to point out to mankind this method of deliverance from death, to which all are liable for sin, *sacrifices* seem to have been originally instituted of God, and hold forth so much

much of the *gospel* to the world. And this, as has been shewn, is a much more rational account, of so *universal* a practice, than *his* ludicrous one, for which there is no foundation in *nature* or *history*. In these acknowledgment was made of *guilt*, and that the offerer deserved to *die*, and a request imply'd, that the life of the sacrificed beast, might be accepted in *lieu* of his, and this might in this method be redeemed. Not, that any could rationally think, this *sacrifice* would indeed redeem, but as *typical* of this *great* sacrifice, that would in the sense explained indeed atone, and redeem those who died for their sins, from *death* and the grave. But to this doctrine he has to object ;

“ If Christ died, says ^e he, to shew God's irreconcilable *hatred* to sin (which it seems Dr. Clark had asserted) “ and vindicate the *honour* of his laws, this could have no influence on *those*, “ who never heard of Christ.” If he means it could not influence them to hate sin, and honour those laws, this is right. And therefore they could not have the *advantage* of this consideration ; nor therefore the *same* helps towards being religious and happy, as those who have. But they might yet have *benefit* by this death, in the pardon of sin, granted for *its* sake. But he goes on :

“ AND those who have (heard of Christ) may “ be so perverse, as not to imagine, that pardoning “ the *guilty* and punishing the *innocent*, could shew “ irreconcilable *enmity* to guilt, or *love* to innocence.” A very candid way of stating the matter, and very familiar to *this* author. The sufferer, having power over his own life, becomes a voluntary *substitute* in the room of the guilty, and consents that *their* guilt should so far be *his*, as to die, to redeem them from the power of the grave, and purchase immortality for them. He is not punish-

ed as an *innocent*, but one consenting to be punished for *their* guilt, and so far in *their* room and stead, and as their *Vicarius*; not indeed to exempt them from death *the wages of sin*, but from remaining under its power. If he had power over his own life, whether *originally* as God, or *by grant* from the father, he might yield it for valuable considerations, such as the *honour* of God's laws, and the *salvation* of mankind. And if he freely offered his life for this end, he had no *injury* done to him, nor did himself do any, by disposing of a life, that was at his disposal, for such valuable ends. He is not punished *for* his innocence, nor *as* an innocent; but as one who has so far taken on himself the guilt of *others*, as to suffer for them. Where is the inconsistency of God's requiring him, in this case, to give up his life, or his own yielding it on such command? He had power to do this *last*, and God could do no injury in the *first* case, because he was *fully* consenting, a thorough *volunteer*, and *volenti non fit injuria*, to such a one no wrong can be done.

BUT where all the while is God's *love* to innocence? It is plain none but an innocent, could have been such a *vicarious sufferer*. Had he been *no*-cent, his *own* guilt, rather than that of *others*, would have appeared as the reason of his suffering. And was it not *honour* put on him, when his life was accepted for the redemption of *mankind*? But when it is also considered how vast a *recompence* he had for thus honouring the authority of God's laws, and redeeming sinners from death, there is not only a *conspicuous*, but *illustrious* proof, given of God's *love* to innocence. Though therefore an innocent was *punished*, that the guilty might be *pardoned*, God's hatred of sin, and love to innocence, still manifestly appear, in this awful transaction: And it must be *perverseness* of *imagination* indeed, to think otherwise. God does not punish *innocence*, but greatly and gloriously rewards the voluntary sufferings of

an *innocent*, for the good of the guilty, and the honour of his laws. And puts an high value on his sufferings, when so many who are guilty, are on this account capable of *pardon*, the *favour* of God and *life eternal*. And when the innocent, for such an act of obedience to God, and his regard to his glory and good-will to sinful creatures, is so *accepted*, *approved*, *honoured* and *rewarded*, does not God's love to *innocence* shine forth with a lustre that must strike, and even *dazzle* every eye? And does not God's *hatred* to sin appear, when *such* an innocent, one so near and dear to him, must be *punished*, e'er sinners can be *pardoned*? But^f he goes on.

“AND perhaps governed by *prejudice*, might think oddly of a *king*, who though he freely *pardoned* *repenting rebels*, yet should cause his *only*, and most *loyal son*, to be put to death, to shew his *hatred* of *rebellion*, and to vindicate the honour of those laws, that *forbid* the putting an innocent to death, and any person to be instrumental to his *own* death, much more to *sacrifice himself*.” Another instance this, of his *candour* in stating a point, and how much men are governed by *prejudice*, in favour of a cause they have, or right or wrong, espoused. The case here put to support this *prejudice*, is no way parallel. An *earthly prince* neither gave his son his life, nor *maintained*, nor *has* power over it, nor can give him power, nor when it is taken away, can *restore* it, nor can confer any *rewards* on his dead son, nor make him *offer* of any recompense, for such *dutiful* concern for his honour, and such *good-will* to his rebellious subjects. And what resemblance is there between this, and the case of *Christ* dying in obedience to his father, for mankind's *redemption*.?

AND yet as he puts the case, it must give rebellious subjects a very *hateful notion* of rebellion, when

when it is so odious to a *wise* and *good* sovereign, that to redeem them from the *penalty* threatned by the law, his *own son* must be put to death. And it must very much *endear* such a sovereign to them, if for their redemption he should *deliver his son* to death, and very much *endear* their prince and his memory to them, if when they were all in his father's power, he, for their sakes, would yet consent *to die*. How much must this *discourage* future rebellion? And if they have the least ingenuity, how powerfully must their gratitude for such grace and favour, *prompt* to duty and obedience? Must not these *united* considerations more forcibly incite to future fidelity, than if their sovereign freely pardoned them, without shewing any concern to *vindicate* the honour of his government? Should these rebels have been received to mercy on such *easy terms*, might not *others* take encouragement from it also to rebel? But when to make them *capable* of pardon, so *dear* a purchase must be paid, who could hope to rebel with impunity? And this is a consideration that should have its *weight* here; God having *other creatures* under his government, besides mankind.

BUT his talk of “doing honour to *those* laws which *forbid* the putting an innocent person to death, and *any* person being instrumental to his *own* death, and much more *sacrificing* himself,” is very wide from the purpose. No *earthly* prince can put an *innocent* to death, because he has not forfeited *his life*. No common man can take away his own life, or sacrifice himself, because he has *not power* over his own life. But is the great God, the giver and Lord of life, upon the *same terms* with his creatures, as an earthly prince with his subjects? Has he no power over the *lives* of his creatures? Can he not take them away on a valuable consideration, especially when he *promises* their

their restoration, and a full recompense, for laying them down for his sake. Cannot he oblige *innocents* to lay down their lives, for *his* honour and the sake of virtue? Or is a man to preserve life, at the expence of virtue and a good conscience? Are all the glorious boasts of the perfection of natural religion dwindled to this? And is it thus we are to understand his talk, "that God *can* require nothing" "from his creatures, but what is for *their* good?" No commands of God can bind a man, it seems, to be *instrumental* to his own death, nor offer himself a *sacrifice* for virtue's sake, and a good conscience. He *must* leave room to the *free-thinking* few, to save themselves by complying with what their consciences condemn. But certain it is, that when God commands *any one*, to offer himself a *sacrifice* to the malice of his enemies, or permit himself to be destroyed by them, for religion or virtue's sake, he is bound to *do it*. And if whilst *they* maliciously put him to death, *himself* yields up his life, offers it to God, with *dutiful resignation* to his will, he makes an *offering* of himself to God, and all the while is but doing *his duty*.

AND was not this the very case as to *Christ* himself? Was not he thus murder'd by malicious Enemies? And when he was in *their* hands, and suffering from *them*, might he not make an *offering* of himself to God, and that to vindicate the honour of those laws, among the rest, which they were violating, by putting so glorious an *innocent* to death? And was not this properly a *sacrifice* of himself? And that to *atone* for sin? Since by agreement between him and his father, it was to set forth the evil of sin, and God's displeasure against it, and redeem mankind from *death*.

AND was he not instrumental to his own death, by the purity of his *doctrine*, the holiness of his *life*, the faithful reproofs he gave the *Scribes*, *Pharisees*,
| and

and priests, and the reproach his excellent example dashed in the faces of his enemies? And yet, did he, by this, break any law of God? Was he not, all the while, faithfully discharging the duties of his office? Even though he foreknew the event? Considering him as a man and no more, he might in this manner be instrumental to his own death, and sacrifice himself, and God might vindicate the honour of those laws among others, that forbid the putting an innocent to death, in requiring him to act this part.

BUT when we attend to his dignity in himself, and his original relation to God, and the full Power he must have, either from himself as God, or by grant from the Father, over his own life, and that he took our flesh, and became man with this view, that he might be made an offering for sin; it is plain, that laws binding on mankind, as men, could have no tie in this respect, on him. And though men are, by the law of nature, prohibited the putting an innocent to death, the great God is under no such prohibition, with respect to an innocent consenting to be put to death, and who had a body prepared for him for this very end; no, not though himself had issued a warrant for his execution or sacrifice. Yet this was not the case. The Jews had no commission from heaven to put him to death, but barbarously murdered him, in defiance of all laws human and divine. And the Son of God, in the flesh he had assumed, had power to make an offering or sacrifice of himself to God, to lay down his life and resume it. ^a This commandment he had received from his Father, and did actually obey on the cross, when in full strength, and long before the malefactors crucified with him, he gave up the Ghost. He was not bound by those laws that

^a Heb. x. f.

^b John x. 18.

that are obliging on common men, but those only peculiar to his undertaken office, in this particular.

NOR was it to vindicate the honour of any law of God in particular, but his laws in general, and the authority and honour of the law-giver, from whence all have their binding force, that he made himself a sacrifice. This had been slighted and renounced by his rebellious subjects; and to his infinite wisdom, it seemed fit, that it should be vindicated, e'er they were pardoned, that for the future due regard might be paid to laws he had given, or should hereafter give, whether founded in the reason of things; or on his sole authority, and that none of his subjects might think with themselves they might transgress with impunity. And if for this purpose, a design so valuable in its self, and so worthy the world's ruler, any law of his needed a suspension, he could not want authority to suspend it. And yet as the case was in fact, no law of his needed any suspension. Christ might, in the sense explained, be instrumental to his own death; and whilst the Jews wickedly murdered him, might make a sacrifice of himself to God, and every law of God and nature remain in full force, and even the honour of that law among the rest, that forbids the putting an innocent to death might, as divine, be vindicated. But says he,

“COULD those philosophers, who did not imagine any virtue in sacrificing beasts, to wash away the sins of men, easily conceive, that an human sacrifice, which they believed human nature abhorred, could be an expiation for sin?” I know not what his philosophers can conceive or believe. But supposing them right in believing beasts, offered in sacrifice, could not properly wash away the sins of men, and that nature abhors the slaying men on an altar, which he must mean by sacrificing them, yet

yet has not the great Lord of life power to require one sacrifice, for so valuable an end, if he thinks meet? And is not the plain signification of his will in the case, a sufficient warrant for a creature of his, to yield himself up to such a death, though, in order to it, he must vanquish all the horrors of nature against death? But in the circumstances, in which our Saviour died, what is there to shock the nature of any philosopher, the monstrous wickedness of the Jews excepted, though he offered himself a sacrifice to God? Whilst wicked men murdered him, might he not offer up the life they took away, and his blood which they shed, in sacrifice to God? And might not his death, as such, expiate the sins of men; as by *compact* between him and his Father, his death in this manner should redeem them from the power of death? As it vindicated his injured honour, and shew'd his irreconcilable hatred to sin, when the life of so glorious a person, as his own and only son, must be taken away e'er he could, with due regard to his authority and rights, forgive it, at least, *thought meet* so to do. And though the sacrificing beasts can't properly wash away men's sins, they might be a very proper *hint* of an human sacrifice, or, more properly, of one *more than man*, that would have such virtue, and that offered to God, in a way that would not shock human nature. But^k he goes on,

"Q. that sin *freely pardoned*, could want any "expiation. Or that all was *mere mercy and free* "forgiveness, after a *full equivalent and adequate* "satisfaction given." For my part, the doctrine of an *equivalent and adequate satisfaction* for sin, I do not understand. I know not that it is any doctrine delivered in scripture. And the foundations laid for it in reason by some, seem not *solid* to me. I doubt whether an *equivalent* for the sins of man-kind,

kind, on the usual supposition of sin's *infinite* guilt, is in nature possible. For if sin in general be of infinite guilt, *every* sin must have such infinite guilt, nor could *any number* of sins, without such supposition, have infinite guilt, since no determinate number of *finites* can make up an *infinite*. But if *every* sin be infinite, an *infinite* satisfaction only can be *adequate* to it, and an equivalent for it; and every *other* sin must require an *equal* satisfaction. And this being to be made by death, seems impossible to be had, at least, unless one who is infinite should die *toties quoties*.

BUT when a person of the *highest* dignity dies, to redeem sinners from death, the utmost demonstration that can be given, is given of God's *barred* to sin, and thereby the utmost discouragement to it; which, in my account, is what is meant by *expiation* for it, or *purgation* from it. It is making sinners capable of pardon, with a *salvo* for the divine honour and rights, and care to guard them from future contempt, and make his creatures know, that though he is a gracious God, *who pardoneth iniquity, transgression, and sin*, yet he will not suffer his *authority* to be trampled on, nor his *laws* violated, but at their peril.

BUT what he means by sins not *needing* expiation, that are freely *pardoned*, or have been pardoned, I do not understand. Is it meant of sins pardoned *antecedently* to the atonement made? Full pardon of sins is never granted, 'till sinners are redeemed from the power of *the grave*. And in *this* sense no sin was ever pardoned *antecedently* to the expiation made. And as to every thing *else*, imply'd in the pardon of sin, the expiation might have *retrospect* to all sin *antecedently* forgiven; or which is the same, *that* might be remitted, on *account* of expiation to be hereafter made, at the time prefixed by the divine purpose; which however puzzling to his philosophers,

losophers, to any men of plain, common sense, is easily intelligible.

Or does he mean, that they can't conceive, how sins can need expiation, if they are freely pardoned; but must apprehend expiation for sin, and a free pardon to be a contradiction? But sure they may not only be freely pardoned, but more than freely, though a sacrifice of atonement be offered, whilst this is of God's providing. This way of pardoning sin, has more of grace and good-will to sinners in it, than if it were entirely gratuitous. God is at more expence, if one may so say, that sinners may have their pardon. To them it is wholly free. And if there were a bar, in the way to their pardon, and God himself removes it; the favour is as gratuitous to them, and much more gracious in God, than if there never had been such impediment, since it has been removed at his cost. His propensions to forgive sin appear the stronger, his great good-will to mankind, doom'd to die for sin; his pity and mercy to them stand in the fairer light. ¹ Herein is love, not that we loved God, but he loved us, and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins. ^m God so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son, that he might dispense free, rich, and full pardons, without giving any encouragement to new affronts, or giving occasion to any of his subjects to think, they might sin and rebel against him, with impunity. Is the pardon the less free to sinners, for that the Son of God, the holy, harmless, undefiled Jesus, was given of him to be a sacrifice for sin, that he might extend mercy to them, who believe in him, and by him return to God, without derogating from the honour of his laws and government? Nay, supposing a full equivalent possible, and actually given for the pardon, yet to the sinner himself, it is mere, it is rich mercy and pure forgiveness;

¹ 1 John iv. 10.^m John iii. 16.

the sinner having *no share* in the payment of this equivalent.

But this author proceeds on plain mistake in all his argument. It supposes the expiation made to appease divine wrath and revenge, and melt him down to a forgiving temper, and render him propitious to sinners, who had provoked him. Whereas his good will to sinners, is the original and source of all. His love is every where in scripture set forth as the great prompter, to redeem mankind, and in this way dispense pardon to sinners. Just displeasure he had against sin, but at the same time merciful propensions towards sinners. The scriptures represent him as *merciful and gracious, long suffering and abundant in goodness, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin; as, ° good and ready to forgive; as, ° gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness.* It is this goodness and mercy is the true source of his forgiving sinners. And the sacrifice offered, is so far from properly pacifying his wrath, and melting him down into a benevolent being, that it is one of the most glorious manifestations that he is so. He is of himself prone to forgive; but he thinks it not proper, to forgive rebels against his government and laws, in such a way, as shall impair his own authority, or hurt his subjects, by too great lenity towards sin or sinners. This obstacle in the way of his mercy, himself removes, by providing one, his own and only son, to bear the sins of mankind, and suffer death for them. And it is his love and great good-will, that prompts him to make this provision, that, the obstacle being removed, he may follow his own gracious propensions, and pardon penitents, and receive them to mercy, in the way of the gospel.

Is there any thing in this, to shock any philosopher, any man of wisdom or sound sense? Is there

° Exod. xxxiv. 6. ° Psal. lxxxvi. 5. ° Joelii. 13. Jon. iv. 2.

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any thing in it repugnant to reason, or unworthy of God? Has he not herein shewn a *wise* and *fit* concern for his *own* authority, and the good of *all* his subjects, and manifested great goodness and mercy to sinful mankind? And this to the more glorious display of his *grace*, than if he had forgiven sin, *without* any expiation for it.

So that upon the whole, there is *no room* for exception against this *evangelical doctrine* of the *forgiveness of sin on the sacrifice of Christ*. God appears like himself, the great, the wise, the good governour of the world, in dispensing his pardons in this manner, and even *more kind* as well as *more venerable*, than if he had treated sin with more *indulgence*, and forgiven sinners *without* any previous assertion and vindication of his authority, by giving up his *son* to death for it.

Sub §. III. His Objection to Christianity from the Doctrine of a Mediator, considered.

HE has another objection to christianity from the doctrine of a Mediator. He does not indeed attack this *directly*. But every one may see, that his endeavours to shew the absurdity of the *heathens* belief concerning their *mediatory Gods*, is more *silly* to undermine and destroy this doctrine of the gospel, and render it, if he can, absurd and ridiculous.

THIS doctrine as delivered in the *scriptures*, is in it self very *rational* and *consistent*: and that the reader may judge of this matter, it will not be improper to set it *briefly* before him.

THE *scriptures* then tell us, ^a that *there is one God, and one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus; who having made peace with the blood of his cross, entered by this blood, once into the*

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^a 1 Tim. ii. 5.

^b Col. i. 20.

^c Heb. ix. 12.

body place, or into heaven, [†] there to appear in the presence of God for us, by this appearance [‡] making intercession for such as come to God by him, or being ^{*} their advocate with the father, or offering himself as the sacrifice slain, as a reason why such should be accepted of God, and have their sins forgiven, and be saved. So that it is [‡] through him we have access to God, and in his name, that is, for his sake, we are to ask pardon of sin, and ^{*} every blessing we are encouraged to expect. For his sake, I say, who has so much honoured God, ^{*} by his obedience to the death of the cross, and for this humiliation and obedience, has been so highly exalted of God, has a name given him above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue confess him Lord, to the glory of the father; even universal Lord, head over all things, having [†] all power in heaven and earth put into his hands, and this for the good of his Church. [‡] God having set him at his own right hand, far above all principality and power, and might and dominions, and every name that is named both in this world and that which is to come, and has put all things under his feet, and given him to be head over all things, to his church. So that by him God dispenses all his favours to mankind. For as there [†] is one God, of whom are all things, so there is one Lord Jesus Christ by whom are all things. He has the dispensation of the spirit, both in his ^{*} miraculous gifts and [†] ordinary operations. He has power to [‡] controul all the enemies of his people, and order all things throughout the world for their good. And at the day appointed of God, he will [†] call the dead out of their graves, summon

† 1 Pet. 24.

‡ Ch. vii. 25.

* 1 John ii. 1.

‡ Eph.

ii. 18.

* John xvi. 23, 24.

‡ Phil. ii. 8—12.

‡ Mar.

xxvii. 18.

‡ Eph. i. 20—23.

‡ 1 Cor. viii. 6.

‡ Acts

ii. 33.

‡ 1 Cor. xii. 5.

‡ Rom. viii. 9, 10, 11.

‡ 1 Cor.

xy. 25.

‡ John v. 28, 29.

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summon the living before him, judge the world in righteousness, and pronounce sentence on good and bad, * that every one may receive the things in his body according to what he hath done, whether good or bad.

IN this office God requires, that he should be owned and honoured, in him sinners must believe and trust, for the forgiveness of sin, and favour of God: † He being set forth as a propitiation through faith in his blood for the remission of sins, and ‡ they having redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sin. By him they are to present themselves and services to God, seeing in this § beloved of God only they are made accepted. ¶ By him they must return to God from a course of sin, and after their return, must, on all occasions, go to God by him, and in his name ask the supply of their wants, and all good things. In a word, by him as the appointed medium, they are to offer up themselves and services to God, by or through him they are to derive all blessings from God: He being the ¹ administrator of his kingdom of grace; the ² head of his people, to ³ quicken and lead them by his spirit, govern them by his laws, and ⁴ protect them by his power against spiritual enemies, and at last bestow upon them a crown of glory. †

AND is not this a constitution full of grace to mankind, and for the honour of God and the redeemer? In which God shines forth in awful majesty, and the most amiable mercy and benevolence. In which sinners under all their guilty fears, and christians amidst all their imperfections, temptations and difficulties, have the most sure relief? When one in their nature, and yet so near and dear to God, appears

¹ Acts xvii. 31. ² 2 Cor. v. 10. ³ Rom. iii. 25.
 ⁴ Eph. i. 7. ⁵ Ibid. ver. 6. ⁶ Heb. viii. 25. ⁷ Eph.
 iii. 12. Heb. iv. 14, 15, 16. ⁸ 1 Cor. xv. ⁹ Eph.
 iv. 15, 16. ¹⁰ Rom. viii. 9, 10, 14. ¹¹ Heb. i. 9. ¹² Heb.
 x. 12, 13. ¹³ 2 Tim. iv. 8. ¹⁴ Rev. ii. 10.

appears in the presence of God for them, shewing himself as *sacrificed* for them, and so pleading for their pardon, and all the blessings promised, on their *belief* in him. What humble and yet firm *confidence* in God, must this give them? What *relief* must this afford them, under all temptations and discouragements! How much must it *endear* God to them, and *enflame* love and devotion to him in their hearts? How much must it *hearten* them in their faithful service? And when the *iniquities of their heels compass them about*, *infirmities* discourage them, and *temptations* beset them, what *ease* must it give their minds to have one *appearing* before God for them, nay, *seated at his right hand*, that can be *touch'd with the feeling of their infirmities*, and *was in all things tempted as they are, but without sin*. How wise and gracious is the constitution throughout? How *glorious* to God? How *merciful* to man? And what can be reasonably *objected* against it?

It is, saith *this* author, to the absurdity of debasing God, and clothing him with our infirmities, and judging of him by ourselves, that "the mediatory Gods of the *heathens*, owe their rise." It may be so. But how does he make this out? "Had they believed a *supreme Being* was *every where*, and knew all their thoughts at all times, they could never have taken such a *round-about way* of addressing him, who not only knew what they *desired*, but their *real wants*, and what would relieve them, *better* than any *mediatory Being* whatsoever." What sentiments *heathens* had concerning their mediatory Gods, I have no concern to enquire. But his reasoning against them, is plainly intended against the *christian mediator*; though, in this view, it is exceeding *weak* and *trifling*. Whatever *heathens* did, *christians* do believe, that God is every

every where present, perfectly knows all their desires and real wants, and is able and willing to relieve them. Though they do not all believe, he knows them better than the mediator, at least those who believe the mediator *very God*, have no such belief: yet they reckon it a *great privilege* to have a mediator, by whom, and in whose name, they may offer their requests to God. He knows all our desires and wants, and what is for *our good*, better than we ourselves. Must we therefore offer up our requests for no supplies, nor good things? This were to discard prayer at once. If we must pray to him notwithstanding, and God is *every where*, and prayer to him every where implies *as much*; can we yet look to him with confidence, whilst conscious of guilt? Does not this naturally create distrust? hang heavy on the mind, and hold it back, when it would lift its self towards God? And in such a case, is it not a great relief to the mind, to have one so *nearly allied* to God and man appointed and authorized to *recommend* sinners and their imperfect prayers and services, to divine favour and acceptance? One who *has loved* mankind to the death, and *given himself* for them to God, *a sacrifice of a sweet smelling savour*?

THOUGH God be ever so gracious and merciful in himself, his *awful authority* must strike a damp on the heart *conscious* of having violated his laws? It can't be sure, without any misgiving, that on repentance merely, sin shall be forgiven: Not to observe, that the soul, *duely sensible* of sin, will be conscious of great *backwardness* to this duty, nor find it so exceeding easy, to break loose from sinful habits, as *this author* seems to conceit. And under *this sense*, is it not an exceeding relief to a sinner to have one in his own nature, *exalted to be a prince and saviour*, to give repentance and remission of sin? Knowing that there is such an advocate for sinners

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ners with the father, and that *God is in him reconciling the world to himself*, must he not pour out his prayers before God, with greater *freedom, confidence and fervency*? Must he not have *better hopes*, than those grounded only on the *great goodness* of his sovereign, when yet displeased with him for sin? Can such an one be rid, at once, of all *misgivings*, and assure himself that God will drop *all regard* to his own sovereign rights, and receive the penitent, on his return, with *open arms*? Will he not naturally have the stronger confidence and consolation from the *mediation of Christ*, and a constitution that at once *secures* the rights of God, *maintains* the honour of his laws and government, and makes the most glorious and astonishing *display* of his love and good-will to sinners? And must not the sinner struggling with sinful *biasses and inclinations*, and beset with *manifold temptations*, be more heartned to oppose his sins, and break off from them, when from such a *Mediator* he may humbly hope for all needful help for this purpose. But says ^a he,

“If they address the supreme, by *mediatory Beings*, to shew their *unworthiness* to approach him themselves, they shew’d what *unworthy thoughts* they had of him.” Why so? “Since it would be an *affront* even to an *earthly prince*, if present, to hear what was said, not to address to *him* but *another*, to let *him* know what are wanted from *him*.” Is not this wonderfully conclusive? Would a *rebellious* subject shew more respect to an *earthly sovereign*, who should thrust into his presence, and offer his petition *himself*, in how *submissive* a manner soever, than if he desired one in *great confidence* with him, to introduce him into his presence, and present and *recommend* his petition? Would he not take it *better* in such a rebel, from a sense of his guilt

guilt and provocation, to shew this *diffidence*, than if from a pretended intention to *honour* his goodness, he presumed to come into his presence, and begg'd his life and a restoration to his favour. *Majesty* becomes a prince, as well as *mercy*, if his government and authority be worth any thing, and deserve any regard. And sure the high authority of the world's sovereign is *such*, and of so much importance to the world, that it is worth maintaining: and his *majesty* should be preserved, whilst his *mercy* is display'd. And he must frame very *unworthy* thoughts of God, who makes him *all* lenity and indulgence, without a becoming concern for the authority of his government: and this a *much higher*, than any earthly prince should have, as it is in its self infinitely superior. Yet should an *earthly* prince forbid all *immediate* access of rebellious subjects, however penitent, and require them to make their *submission* in person, but not without being introduced by the *prince-royal* into his presence, and *recommended* to favour: would *be* think, would *any one* think, that such subjects thought *unworthily* of him, if they took *this* method of approaching them, and that they would express *more* respect to him, by neglecting *the* prince, and thrusting into his presence, *themselves* to beg his pardon, from a confidence in his *great goodness*? Would not their sovereign take this as an *affront*, both to *himself* and *son*? And is it not *much more* so, to the glorious God, the God of all grace, when he has constituted his *own son*, mediator between him and sinners, and made him a *sacrifice* for their sins, and conferred on him the power of dispensing *all that help*, that is necessary to make their return to their duty, and performance of it easy, to address *immediately* to him, and not in the *great mediator's* name? And whether this be a constitution that gives *unworthy* notions of God, has been already sufficiently considered.

BUT

“BUT, says he, *Heathens* must think, if they thought at all, that these *mediatory Gods*, could suggest some reasons to the *supreme*, which before he was ignorant of: or that by their importunities, they should prevail on his *weakness*, to do what otherwise he was not willing to do. As this supposed the *supreme God* either ignorant or weak: so it made the *mediatory Gods* to have a greater kindness for, and greater readiness to do good to mankind, and that their solicitations made him better natured to mankind, than otherwise he would be. This, of course, took off their love from the *supreme*, and placed it on those *mediatory Gods*, on whose powerful intercession they so much depended.” What *Heathens* did think of their *mediatory Gods*, and the *supreme God*, is no concern of mine, nor whether they did think at all, about these matters. But whatever they did think, or must think, it is plain from what has been said, that *christians* are under no necessity to think thus concerning God and the *christian mediator between God and men*. Their mediator suggests no reasons unknown to God before. Nor does by his importunity prevail on his weakness, to do what he was otherwise unwilling to do. It is the gross conception this author forms of the matter, that makes him talk after this rate. Christians know that God can have no unknown reasons suggested to him, nor by importunity be induced to do any thing, to which he is not previously willing. Nor is it the business of the mediator to suggest such reasons, or use such importunity. God was willing to shew mercy to sinful men, or this office had never been instituted, nor this mediation of any service. He was inclined to pardon sinners, but regard to his authority and the honour of his laws required, that sin should be punished before sinners were pardoned. For this end the mediator

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was offered up a sacrifice: He rose again from the dead, went up to heaven, carrying his sacrificed body with him, and there appears in the presence of God for sinners. This is the perpetual reason, before concerted between God and him, why he may give scope to his mercy, without dishonour to his majesty or laws: No new reason, or to him, before unknown. And if for the honour of the mediator, he is now to be considered and owned as the only medium, by which sinners are to have access to God, and all needful helps and blessings are to be convey'd and derived from God to them; is not this a constitution honourable to God, and very gracious, condescending and encouraging to men? But what room is there in it, for the mediator's suggesting reasons of which God was ignorant before? for his importuning favours he was before not willing to bestow, and prevailing on his weakness by such importunity? If this were indeed designed by this author, to reproach the christian doctrine of a mediator, how justly must the reproach return on him, who either out of weakness or wickedness so foully misrepresents it?

“Nor is there any thing in the doctrine that makes the mediator to have more kindness for mankind, or greater readiness to do them good, than God himself.” Most christians think him God himself, though another person from the father, who yet is in the scripture represented as the original of the whole scheme, and that out of his great good-will and mercy to sinful men. His pleasure the son came into the world to fulfil, when he prepared a body for him. His love is set forth as the spring of all. ^e God so loved the world, as to give his only begotten son — He sent him into the world, that through him it might be saved. And with his commission he came. ^h In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten

^f Heb. x. 5, 7. ^g John iii. 16, 17. ^h 1 John 12. 9, 10.

gotten son into the world, that we might live through him. And how he presently explains. *Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins.* ¹ God commendeth his love to us, in that, whilst we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. What room have christians, now, to think that the Mediator has more kindness for mankind, than God himself, or greater readiness to do them good? But when he adds, "That his solicitations made God better-natured, than otherwise he would have been," he shews his own ill-nature, with regard to christianity, but has nothing in the world to support such talk. Nor has he any foundation for his inference, "That this, of course, must take off men's love from God, and fix it on the mediator, on whose powerful intercession men so much depend." For it is from God's great, and indeed astonishing love to men, that a Mediator was provided, and commissioned and constituted such an officer, to commend sinful men and their services to God, and convey his blessings and favours to them; and this with a manifest design to beget the most devout love to God in their hearts, and make them perfectly and eternally happy, in the perfection of this love.

And how admirably is the constitution fitted, to subserve and promote this design? If the Mediator must also be owned, honoured, believed, loved, obeyed and trusted in *as such*, how reasonable is this duty? And who, but such as never relished his love, can have a word to object against it? Vain men, indeed, conceited of their own sufficiency to know and do the will of God, and contracting all the duties of religion into a very narrow compass, and suiting them to their own taste and humour, to support this fond conceit, may despise and ridicule this wise, and righteous, and merciful method of

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¹ Rom. v. 8.

reconciling God and his offending creatures, and repairing the ruins made in human nature by sin. But the soul, conscious of its great guilt, and heinous violations of the law of nature, its revolt from God and enmity to him, and its manifold and great deviations from the rule of life, and defects and imperfections of its best performances, will own, approve, applaud, admire and adore, the majesty, wisdom and mercy of God shining forth, with so strong but lovely and attractive a lustre, in this evangelical constitution.

Sub §. IV. *His Objection to the Christian Revelation, from the little good Effect of it, visible in the Lives of Christians, considered.*

HIS last and indeed best argument against christianity, is the behaviour of those who profess it, could he make it out. For if christianity makes men no better than heathenism did, what is it better than even that gross corruption of the religion of nature, or what is the world the better for it? the true end of all religion being to make men religious. "What impartial man, says * he, who has compared the present and former condition of mankind, can think the world much mended since the time of Tiberius? Or though ever so well vers'd in church-history, can, from the conduct of christians find, that they are arrived at any higher state of perfection than the rest of mankind, who are supposed to continue in a state of degeneracy and corruption." This is backed by a quotation from Dr. Burnet, *de Fide & Officiis Christianorum*, hinting "that should the wise men of the heathen world rise from the dead, and carefully survey the globe,

* Page 366.

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“ng to be, and then ask of us, what *benefit* Christian religion had been to mankind, with regard to good manners and probity of life, with regard to peace and publick tranquillity (the sense is here imperfect) you call us *barbarians* indeed, in a way of reproach, but wherein are you *christians* better than *we*?” And Mr. Leibnitz saying, “In truth such doth our condition seem to me, corruptions, novelty, where growing to so immense an height, that it seems almost necessary, that some *Chinese* missionaries should be sent to us, to teach us the use and practice of *natural religion*, as we send to them some to teach them the *christian* theology. And Navarette telling us, that did the *Chinese* know what is done in *Christendom*, they would spit in the missionaries faces.” And, “That few are converted in those parts where they converse with *Europeans*: and those who are converted, prove so bad, that it were better they had never been *baptized*.” And finally, bishop Kidder saying, “That were man to chuse his religion, by the lives of those who profess it, perhaps christianity would be the *last* religion he would chuse.”

I HAVE set forth this objection in all the strength he gives it, that himself may not complain, but especially that christians, so called, both ministers and people, clergy and laity, may be more careful to silence this argument of *unbelievers*. For what will it avail us, to boast of the excellency and divinity of our religion, if our lives are no better than those of *Pagans*, or even worse than theirs? *Pudet hæc Obprobria nobis.* We have reason to be ashamed, that there is so much room for this reproach.

But to the objection its self, I would say,

First, It is hardly possible any man should fully compare the present state of mankind, with that which

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the times of *Tiberius*, or *anecdotes* in it. We are in a good measure the witnesses of the present condition of mankind; their great disorders, vices and corruptions. Of ages so far past, we can know nothing but by history. And how seldom does history enter in to so particular an account of private life, as falls under every man's eye and observation. And yet if the satyrist's *Journal* and *Pate's Debitor*, or even the historian *Suetonius* are to be regarded, the condition of mankind was a very depraved one in the times of *Tiberius*, and those which closely followed it. Our times, it must be owned, are much too *bad*, and *christian* lives in general too little influenced by the principles of their religion; yet are there not a few, who endeavour in all things to adorn the doctrine of their God and Saviour. And bad as we are, I doubt not but we should see that examples of *real religion* and *virtue* are much more numerous amongst us than in the *pagan* world at that time, had we as *particular* a knowledge of it as we have of mankind in our times. And what reason there is for it, will be more plainly seen as we go on.

Common History, indeed, gives but a melancholly account of the contests and quarrels among christians; and the mischief occasioned by them in the church and world; but enter little into private lives and characters. We may judge by it of the temper of party leaders and the credulity of their followers. But how vain is it to go thither to learn what the behaviour was of particular christians. Church history is in this respect like *other history*. It gives an account of the *histories* in the church, those who put themselves forward, and made themselves be taken notice of, when much more valuable men, perhaps, lived privately, and died without any *historical* mention of them.

Secondly, it is not fair to make rhetorical complaints a state of facts. Such certainly is that of Bp.

Kiddens, and such I take *Laibniz's* to be. Grieved with the corruptions of the christian world, and willing to rouse men out of this *bad state*, they amplify and exaggerate beyond what is *strict fact*. Nor to observe that *Laibniz* must better know the state of mankind, under his own observation, than that of the *Chinese*, from the report of others. Travellers, according to common observation, love to report things unusual and strange, to raise admiration. Nor does Dr. *Burnet's* saying at all appear a state of fact, or a comparison of the pagan with the christian world, as to the practice of universal morality. He speaks only of social virtues practised by philosophers, and regarding fair and plain dealing, and the study of peace and the publick good. And might think it reproach enough on the common run of nominal christians, that the pretenders to wisdom, and teachers of it among the *heathens*, might in this manner upbraid them, without imagining that *heathens* of all sorts and rank might thus parallel themselves with christians. And the virtues he mentions are valuable in themselves, it must be owned, and what all christians are obliged to practise. And sure this author must know many of his acquaintance who do so, under the power of their christian principles: men of punctual honesty in dealing, of great sincerity in their words, professions and promises, of inviolable truth and fidelity in their trusts, and studious of the publick peace and weal. But to set these sayings as states of facts, which are indeed amplifications, is not fair.

As to the *Chinese*, of whom he seems so fond, they lie a great way off, and if travellers are to be credited, are a *nonfact* people. In arts and sciences the *Europeans* compared with them are more bunglers. And having had the advantage of being instructed by *Confucius*, a better, plainer teacher of morality, if this impartial writer may be judge, than

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than *Jesus Christ* himself; it is not to be wondered at if his disciples should much surpass us Christians in their morals. But sure a man who sees things in so false a light, and with such very partial eyes is not fit to represent facts. As to *Napartoo*, I know not what parts of *Christendom* he had seen, but can easily believe the *European* sailors and traffickers in *Cobina* don't much recommend christianity by their behaviour, and may lay great stumbling blocks in the way of those *brethren's* conversion. But is it fair in this author to make this sort of men samples of what christians are?

INDEED the bulk of mankind in all ages and countries have but too little sense of religion, and feel too little of its power and influence, but live slaves to appetites, passions, and their vices. Nor has christianity been able to make the body of those who profess it truly religious. If where it is preached it makes any more religious than men in other parts of the world, or more persons in proportion truly religious, this will make it appear to have been more to the advantage of mankind than the religion of nature. And that this has been the fact, will appear as we go on. Though the religion of nature, as this author must acknowledge, has hardly ever been the religion of any one people on the earth. Nor has it, notwithstanding its perfection in it self, and the boasted sufficiency of the light of nature to discover it, kept any one nation from falling into the most gross and foolish idolatry, and a beseness and corruption of manners suitable to this spiritual darkness, or lust of the mind for the worship of other Gods, besides the true one.

BUT it must also be considered, that christian revelation supposes men to be what they are, and is address'd to them as such. That they have reason, indeed, but with freedom to use or not use it, so heed its dictates or slight and neglect them. That

by they have *appetites* to which they may be slaves, by their *own* consent and choice; and which they may either *control*, or give themselves up to *their* conduct. It proposes therefore its *doctrines*, gives out its *rules* of disc, sets in view its *motives* to enforce their observance, and offers its *helps*, both external means and internal influences; but offers no *violence* to the human faculties, nor forces men to be good and happy whether they *will* or *no*. And if the generality, wherever it comes, *reject* the counsel of God against themselves, *count* themselves unworthy of eternal life, and live in defiance with that religion, which, from education, custom, or worldly interest they profess, these are not christians, tho' they bear or boast the name. Nor is christianity to be reproached with *their* conduct. For,

Thirdly, CHRISTIAN religion is in its own nature admirably fitted to promote true religion and virtue in every branch of it, whatever they do, or wherever they live who profess it. This has been already made appear, and that it gives us a more complete system of natural duties, carries virtue to an higher pitch, builds it on more genuine foundations, prompts to it with more powerful motives, and recommends it by a more illustrious example than all the heathen wisdom ever did or could. It is very unnatural to suppose, that such a religion, accompanied with helps supernatural, and to which the world was at first called to attend, by many great and undoubted miracles, should have no proportionable effects, nor work in a way to which it is naturally fitted, nor carry religious practice higher, nor spread religion wider, than I mean which is inward and real, than the powerless schemes of heathen philosophers, and the very imperfect notions of natural religion dispersed among the heathen vulgar. Especially when propagated by ministers who had no interests in view, but the honour of their God and Saviour, and their own and the com-

their salvation; and left their all, and ran the hazard of their lives; and many of them freely laid them down in this service; and moreover, exemplified the religion they taught, in their own holy, heavenly, innocent and useful lives. Can it be reasonably thought, a religion so fit to make men virtuous, and in this manner preached and propagated, should produce no suitable effects in the hearts and lives of men? nor carry religion farther than they talk of complying philosophers, who if they had more freedom of thought, were as much fettered by their appetites and passions as the rest, and so obsequious and ductile as to fall in almost universally with current superstitions and idolatrous practices. I dare say this must, to all unprejudic'd minds, appear a very unreasonable supposition.

Fourthly, CERTAIN it is, that christian religion, wherever it came, rooted idolatry out of the world, and brought men to the knowledge and spiritual worship of the true and living God. Polytheism, sacrifices, and all the superstitious rites of pagan worship to their many and false Gods, ceased as it were at once. Within about sixty years after our Saviour's death, Pliny writes to Trajan the Roman emperor, that the heathen temples were in a manner deserted in his province, not only in the cities but even the villages. This I take to have been a very good and glorious effect of christianity; the acknowledgment and worship of the one true God, being a principal, the very first duty of natural religion, though in our author's *Abode* it seems to stand for nothing. But sure it must argue the great, and indeed divine power of Christ's religion, that it had such success in the world, in spite of innumerable prejudices, corrupt and vicious biases, the scorn of the reputed wise, the rage of the populace, and the opposition of enraged rulers, and persecuting power. This was doing such good to mankind, as philoso-

phers had *no hearts to do*, however freely or rightly they thought of things divine. And was not this carrying religion *higher* than it was before throughout the *pagan world*? when their sentiments of God were so much *rectified*, and men *restrained* from such gross violations of the law of nature, so common *then and still* throughout the *pagan world*. This good christian revelation did. Herein the "condition of mankind was mended, much mended by it." And christians in this respect, "arrived at a much higher state of perfection, than those who still remained in their degeneracy and corruption, their *superstition and idolatry*."

INDEED with our author, with whom the common good of a particular society, seems to be the supreme law, this may be no advancement of religion or the law of nature, but, perhaps, a breach of it, by disturbing the peace of society, which complying philosophers were careful not to do.

BUT when men, by christian revelation were brought to renounce their idols, abandon their false principles and beloved superstitions, so much in contradiction to their own former sentiments, and the continuing sentiments of all about them, in opposition to their worldly interests, in defiance of scorn, hatred, malice and persecuting power and rage, and at the hazard of all that was dear to them in the world; can it be reasonably thought they should stop here? and not pay an equal regard, according to their importance, to the other rules of the gospel? That they should not also renounce "fleshly lusts, and live soberly and righteously as well as godly in the world. And cleanse themselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God? Can it be thought they should make no conscience of those precepts that require them to give all men

men their duty, ^{to} to follow peace with all men, ^{and} to do good to all men, &c. nay to love their enemies, and not be overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good? It is no way reasonable to suppose, that christian religion should make such a change in men; with regard to the duties of piety towards God, without influencing them to *soberness, temperance and sobriety* in the conduct of themselves, and to *justice and universal benevolence* towards all mankind. Doubtless they believed themselves bound by *all* the laws and rules of the *gospel*, as well as by any; and were as careful to perform every other branch of duty there enjoined them, as well as to *exercise themselves unto godliness*. And must not this imply *pursuit of life, and pursuit of peace and the publick good?*

AND are not the *apologists* of the ancient christians for themselves and their religion, *testimonies* to this fact? They were obliged indeed often to hold their assemblies in *secret*; which gave an handle to their enemies to *calumniate* them very grossly, and charge them with some *barbarous* practices; but their *apologists* very fully refute the slander: and this by shewing, that their religion withheld them not only from such *heinous* evil, but the very *appearance* of evil. And that their enemies had nothing *truly* to object to them but their *religion*; which was indeed their glory: *bonus vir* Cæsar Sejus, *sed christianus*. And it was *their* reply to the boasted virtues and vaunting pretences of the *brabbling* philosophers, *non magne loquuntur, sed vivunt*. We do not proclaim our virtues with arrogant and *boastful* speech, but endeavour by *our lives* to shew what we are, and to exhibit those virtues to the view of the world, which they idly and falsely boast. Is not this a proof of the *good effects* of christian revelation? And that mankind were mended after the time of *Therius*?

IF

Let in after-ages there has been a gross corruption of christianity, the world has crept into the church, and pagan superstition and idolatry, or what is little better, has been let in at a back-door, and christian Ecclesiasticks, so called, have more enlaved the souls and bodies of men, and made greater desolation in the world, by persecutions, crusados, massacres, inquisitions, dragons, &c. than ever pagan priests or princes did; it is but what scripture foretels would happen under the great apostacy. But this is *antichristianism*, not christianity. Nor is it any just reproach to christianity, though it be a very foul one, to those who have so much corrupted the thing, and abused the name. And natural religion may be as righteously charged, with all the superstition and idolatry of the pagan world, as christian religion with these scandalous abuses. One is as much the genuine effect and natural offspring of the first, as the other of the last. And he may as justly quote common history against natural, as church-history against christian religion. *Corruptio optimi pessima*: the best religion when corrupted may become the worst. And what is it that ill, selfish and artful men, may not by their wit and reason pervert and corrupt?

Fifthly, CHRISTIANITY has afforded many illustrious instances of the most eminent virtues, far outdoing all the magnified examples of heathen morality. Not only in the most genuine and sincere piety, in the most rational, spiritual and sublime devotion, the most full resignation and unreserved obedience to God; not only in the regulation of appetites and passions, and the mortification of fleshly affections and lusts, which with this author seem to be minute things, and scarce ingredients of true religion: but in the most extensive benevolence and good-will to all mankind, strangers as well as countrymen, enemies as well as friends, and the greatest resolution and

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brewery, in pursuise of the most benevolent design, the spreading of a religion worthy of God, and pointing out to men the way to true and everlasting happiness. And this from no attachment but that of duty to God, with no views but to his honour, and their own and the common salvation. Obedience to God, and the most warm and generous love to men, prompted them to the noble, the glorious undertaking, and carried them through it. With persevering patience they encountered calumny and scorn, reproach and rage, endured poverty and nakedness, hunger and thirst, wearied themselves out with labour and travel, and yet with unweari'd diligence and unfainting vigour went on: And not in a transport of enthusiastic frenzy, nor in heat of blood, but with the calmest courage met not only a single but a multitude of deaths. And this not for the sake of relations, friends or countrymen, but of strangers and enemies, such enemies as hated them for their good-will, sought their destruction, and hunted for their lives. What was the Theban *Martyrs*, what the Decii, so celebrated in Roman story, devoting themselves for the preservation of their country, to these men offering themselves to all those dangers, sufferings and deaths for the everlasting salvation, not of friends and fellow-citizens, but of mankind, of nations most remote from theirs? Nay, and detaching themselves from their own country, and the private ties which held them, to lift themselves in the service of their whole species, and become more than citizens of the world, that they might draw the world to Christ, and bring them into a fellow-citizenship with saints, and into God's own household. And these not men of noble birth and rank, and liberal education, whose hearts might glow with ambition to be famous and renowned, but men of vulgar extraction and low life, common and inferior people, whom nothing but love to God and men, can reasonably be

supposed

supposed to lead on, and carry through the hard and hazardous service.

THIS is not flourish but fact, not amplification but plain and sober narrative. Let the reader look back on what is before said, of the *Apostle Paul*, his labours, services and sufferings, and remember he is not a single instance, but though he came not behind the chief *Apostles*, yet others in their measure were prompted by the same spirit, went forth on the same errand, exposed themselves to the same perils and sufferings, calmly faced death in various, in the most frightful forms; and many, if not all of them, sacrificed themselves for the honour of God, the service of their Redeemer, and the greatest good of mankind. That in the language of the *Apostle*, alluding to the publick shows among the Romans, "They were set forth last of all, as it were appointed to death; and made a spectacle to the world, to angels and men." And then let him judge impartially, if ever there were like instances of piety towards God, of generous love and good-will to men, of bravery and true courage in the cause of virtue and religion and the service of mankind. Surely the matter was much mended, when men of mean birth and education and low life, would do that, for the honour of God, the service of true religion and the happiness of mankind, which his celebrated philosophers had not the heart to attempt.

NOR can it be thought such examples could be set before mankind, without having their weight and influence; without inspiring others with the same principles, and diffusing the like benevolence and courage through many of their followers, as well as the like piety and devotion, purity of heart and gravity of life: and then the condition of mankind must have been "much mended, and they must

" have

“have arrived at a higher state of perfection than the rest of a degenerate world.” And if still the best of christians had their imperfections and infirmities, nor were wholly free from all errors in life, this only proves corruption so deeply fixed in the hearts of men, that, in the present state, none will be perfectly good and virtuous, no not with all the helps of revelation, but is no disparagement to revelation, nor argument against its being divine and a great blessing to mankind.

Nor have there been wanting instances, of like piety and resolution in the cause of religion and virtue since the first age of the church. What a spirit of genuine piety display'd its self in the first reformers from popery? How boldly did they talk against popish errors and corruptions, how bravely did they suffer in the cause of truth, and with what holy lives did they adorn their profession? If they had their mistakes, and brought too much of the spirit of infallibility with them into the reformation, and though they pleaded, against popery, for every one's right, of judging for himself, in the choice of his religion, yet vacated too much this plea, by assuming that authority themselves, which in the church of Rome they had disclaim'd; this prov'd indeed their imperfection, and that their knowledge and piety had their mixtures and alloys of human frailty, and their zeal for the truths of christianity and the purity of it, made them unattentive to this inconsistency; for which, all circumstances considered, a fair excuse may, in some measure, be made. And still their love for truth, their piety and zeal for God and the service of mankind, their constancy and courage in so glorious a cause, pass all instances of virtue among his philosophers, all instances of benevolence and disinterestedness to the publick.

Lastly,

See *The Lives of Christians no Objection, &c.*

Lastly, As bad as the state of Christendom is at present, there are not wanting instances of virtue, and these in a small number, passing all to be met with in heathen story. Indeed the religion of christians is not ostentation and show, nor courts the observation of mankind, but lies inward and retir'd from public notice. Though they despise not the esteem of their fellow-creatures, nor a good name amongst men, yet what is most strongly operates, with this "author and his philosophers, viz. the desire men have of being in esteem, credit and reputation with their fellow-creatures," is but a low motive, in comparison, with *them*. The acceptance of an invisible God, the secret approbation and testimony of a good conscience, are more to *them* than the applauses of a whole world. For this reason, though they fail not to pay that public worship and devotion which God requires, and live, even under the observation of all, in the fear of God; yet their piety is chiefly withdrawn from common view, and passes between God and themselves, nor falls under observation. Even their alms are done in secret, that their right hands know not what their left hands do. Any farther than their example may be likely useful, they avoid all shew of doing well. Humility and meekness are very important and graceful branches of their character. This will hinder their standing so much to view, as those must, who "by their justice, equity and benevolence, court esteem, credit and reputation amongst mankind." And yet their retired and hidden virtues, shine often out with a lustre passing theirs, and casting a shade over them.

ARE there no christians in England, none known to this author himself, who to the most sincere and unaffected piety to God, add every other virtue?

Whole

The Lives of Christians no Objection, See I. in

Who controul the irregular cravings of their appetites, mortify each fleshly lust, and subdue their passions; who are sober and temperate, meek and patient, chaste and pure, and at the same time practise every branch of justice and equity, mercy and compassion, kindness and courtesy, and breathe good will to all mankind; and manifest this by all the proper tokens of such affection, and even wisely temper their zeal, that it may not hurry them into excesses, and damp their benevolence and charity. And that, according to the apostle's advice, both meditate and practise "whatsoever things are true, are honest, are just, are pure, are lovely, are of good report, or, have any virtue, any thing praise-worthy in them." And, in a word, are good patriots, as well as good christians, and studious of the publick weal and the interests of their country. Sure this author cannot but know, some serious believers of christianity, who are of this temper, and behave in this manner: As A much better manner, than, he can prove, any did behave in the times of *Tiberius*, or any do behave in *Pagan* nations, the most civilized, and better than any do behave, who have learnt the religion of nature, according to his account of it.

THAT no more are to this degree, under the influence of the religion they profess, is not owing to their religion, but *themselves*; and on themselves only must the reproach rest. And it must render them very guilty before God, that by a life so little corresponding with their profession, they so much scandalize infidels, and furnish them with matter of objection, obloquy and slander against it. And were it should be the concern of all christians, in their several stations, and more especially of the ministers of religion, however denominated, to exert themselves, and use their best endeavours, to stop the mouths of infidels, and silence this objection:

And

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And that neither their *own*, nor, as much as in them lies, the lives of *others*, may give any *occasion* of reproach to *their* religion, as if it made men no better than *paganism*, nor as good as the *religion* of *nature*.

F I N I S.

